NATION

Protests hit Manipur, CM says situation sensitive

≫ Page: 4 ≪

BUSINESS

Govt clears Rs 12,980 cr maritime insurance pool for shipping

≫ Page: 7 ≪

SPORTS

RR eye rebound as struggling KKR seek spin spark at Eden

≫ Page: 8 ≪

www.twitter.com/EnglishSalar
www.facebook.com/EnglishSalar
www.instagram.com/dailysalarenglish
youtube.com/@dailysalardigital

SALAR

DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

سالار روزنامہ بنگلور

Website: salarnews.in | www.magzter.com | 19 APRIL 2026 | SUNDAY | BENGALURU | 30 SHAWWAL 1447 H | Vol 5 | Issue No 98 | Pages: 8

Siddaramaiah bats for SC bench in South

BENGALURU, 18 APRIL

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Saturday stressed the need to improve accessibility to the highest court of the land, asserting that establishing a Supreme Court bench in South India would go a long way in ensuring justice. Speaking at the 22nd Biennial State Level Conference of Judicial Officers with a theme 'Reimagining the Judiciary in the era of Artificial Intelligence', he said, the authority of a judge must never be overshadowed by the authority of an algorithm. "Even as we explore these new frontiers, we must remain mindful of the enduring challenges facing our judiciary," the chief minister said. "Pendency of cases continues to be a serious concern that affects the timely delivery of justice. While technology can provide tools to address this, it must be complemented by systemic reforms through strengthening infrastructure, increasing judicial capacity, and modernising court processes," Siddaramaiah said.

—PTI

>>>MORE ON PAGE 2

Govt clears 2% DA hike for central workers, pensioners

NEW DELHI, 18 APRIL

The government on Saturday increased Dearness Allowance (DA) and Dearness Relief (DR) by 2 per cent, benefiting about 50.46 lakh central government employees and 68.27 lakh pensioners. This raises the rate from 58 to 60 per cent of basic pay/pension to help offset inflation.

The combined impact on the exchequer would be Rs 6,791.24 crore per annum, said Information and Broadcasting Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw at the Cabinet meeting chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

24,815CR INDIAN RAILWAY PROJECTS APPROVED FOR UP,AP

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs, chaired by Prime Minister Modi, approved two railway projects on Saturday costing Rs 24,815 crore. The two projects cover 15 districts across Uttar Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh, increasing the Indian Railway network by 601 km. The projects fall under the PM-Gati Shakti National Master Plan and include the construction of 3rd and 4th lines for 403 km Ghaziabad–Sitapur section in Uttar Pradesh and 198 km Rajahmundry–Visakhapatnam section in Andhra Pradesh.

The government identified these as essential routes for transporting commodities such as coal, foodgrains, cement, iron, and steel. Additionally, railways, an eco-friendly, energy-efficient mode, will help meet climate goals and cut logistics costs. *—PTI*

Sources said two Iranian gunboats approached one of the targeted tankers and opened fire without warning approximately 37 kilometres northeast of Oman *—SCREENGRAB*

Iran shuts Hormuz again, fires at Indian tankers

MEA summons Iran envoy; 1 Indian tanker crosses Strait, 4 turn back as IRGC attacks

CAIRO/NEW DELHI, 18 APRIL

—FREEPIK

Tensions in the Strait of Hormuz escalated sharply on Saturday after Iran reversed its decision to reopen the vital waterway and reportedly fired on vessels attempting to pass, amid an ongoing standoff with the United States.

India summoned Iranian envoy Mohammad Fathali after two India-bound vessels were forced to reverse course following reports of gunfire from Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). According to official sources, a convoy of 14 ships carrying crude oil, liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) and fertilisers was disrupted when Iranian forces fired at two vessels transiting the strait. Thirteen ships subsequently turned back to various locations in the Persian Gulf.

One Indian-flagged tanker carrying crude oil was hit by gunfire, resulting in a broken window pane and forcing it to abandon its journey. The extent of damage to the second vessel remains unclear, though it too returned. However, another Indian-flagged ship transporting crude oil for Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Limited successfully crossed the strait and is currently en route to India.

Sources said two Iranian gunboats approached one of the targeted tankers and opened fire without warning approximately 37 kilometres northeast of Oman. The incident occurred in waters between Qeshm and Larak islands, prompting other vessels in the convoy to halt or retreat.

Of the 14 vessels, seven were Indian-flagged, four carried the Liberian flag, two were registered in the Marshall Islands, and one in Vietnam. Six ships were transporting crude oil, three carried LPG, and four were loaded with fertilisers; five were bulk carriers. All had been travelling in formation. Of the 13 halted vessels, seven are currently drifting south of Larak Island awaiting clearance from Iranian authorities.

WEST ASIA WAR DAY-50

The Indian government is understood to be in active coordination with Tehran to ensure the safe passage of stranded ships and crews.

The escalation follows Iran's announcement that it had once again closed the Strait of Hormuz, citing alleged violations by the United States of a prior understanding. Iran's joint military command stated that control of the strait had "returned to its previous state" under strict oversight by its armed forces, warning that transit would remain restricted as long as the US blockade of Iranian ports continues. The United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations centre also reported that Iranian gunboats fired on a tanker, though the vessel and crew were safe. Separately, a container ship was struck by an unidentified projectile, causing limited damage.

The Strait of Hormuz, through which nearly one-fifth of the world's oil supply passes, remains a critical flashpoint. The US blockade, aimed at curbing Iran's trade, has been met by Tehran's use of the strait as leverage, intensifying fears of an energy crisis. With a ceasefire due to expire next week, uncertainty over maritime access continues to disrupt global shipping and energy markets. *—PTI*

>>>More on Pages 2, 5 & 6

Oppn committed foeticide: PM on delimitation bill defeat

NEW DELHI, 18 APRIL

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday launched a sharp attack on opposition parties following the defeat of the Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill, 2026 — described by the government as a key reform tied to delimitation and women's representation.

In a televised address to the nation, Modi accused parties including the Congress, Trinamool Congress (TMC), Samajwadi Party and DMK of "mercilessly crushing" the aspirations of women and committing what he termed the "foeticide of this honest endeavour". He said their opposition had derailed efforts to expand women's participation in legislatures.

"I seek forgiveness from all women of the country," the Prime Minister said, adding that the "self-serving politics" of opposition parties had come at the cost of women's empowerment. He said the legislation was an "honest effort" aimed at ensuring balanced empowerment across the country.

Modi alleged that opposition parties had "celebrated their selfish politics" by blocking the Bill and accused them of taking women's power for granted. "Today, every citizen of India is witnessing how the march of India's women has been halted. The dreams of the country's women have been mercilessly crushed," he said.

He further accused the opposition of committing a "sin" by opposing the measure and warned they would be "punished" for it. "They have committed an offence against the Constitution and against the womanhood of this country," he said.

The Prime Minister also criticised the Congress, saying it had missed an opportunity to "correct past mistakes" and "script new history". He accused "family-run parties" of resisting women's progress out of political self-interest.

Alleging divisive tactics, Modi said the Congress had spread falsehoods about a North-South divide. "A woman forgets everything, but not her insult," he said, adding that the opposition's actions would be remembered. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 3

'BJP's plot to change federal structure defeated'

Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Saturday accused the Centre of conspiring to change the federal structure of the country in the garb of women's reservation and asserted that the defeat of the bill to amend the women's quota law in the Lok Sabha was a victory of democracy and opposition unity.

She underlined that the Opposition was not against reservation for women and would support the Women's Reservation Act, 2023, if the government sought to implement it on the current strength of the Lok Sabha.

"It was a victory for the Constitution, the country and the unity of the opposition," she told. She said it was a "black day" for the government, which saw a bill defeated in Parliament for the first time,

>>>Read on Page 3: BJP using women quota to stay in power: Priyanka

TOY CAR FITTED WITH IED

4 terror suspect arrested; India Gate, Red Fort were targets

NEW DELHI, 18 APRIL

Delhi Police has arrested four 'radicalised' men from Maharashtra, Odisha and Bihar who allegedly planned terror activities, carried out recce of sensitive locations to target them and attempted to recruit others through encrypted online platforms.

Giving details of the incident police said here on Saturday that an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) and related material were seized during the operation. Two of the accused were in the process of assembling a remote-controlled toy car fitted with an IED to target crowded places, they alleged.

The Special Cell apprehended two of the accused from Maharashtra and one each from Odisha and Bihar in a coordinated, intelligence-led operation, the officials said.

All four accused -- Mosaib Ahmad, Mohammad Hammad, Mohammad Sohail and Sheikh Imran -- belong to modest socio-economic backgrounds. A case has been registered and further investigation is underway to identify their associates, handlers and the broader network," the officer said.

The accused are Mosaib Ahmad, Mohammad Hammad, Mohammad Sohail and Sheikh Imran *—SCREENGRAB*

Investigators said the module had also discussed potential strikes on high-value targets such as the Ram temple in Ayodhya, the Parliament House and certain military installations.

The four were influenced by extremist ideology centred around the idea of establishing a Caliphate and were promoting narratives such as "Ghazwa-e-Hind", the police alleged

A senior police officer said the accused were active on closed and encrypted social media groups where content related to jihad, extremist ideology and weapons was shared.

"One of the accused allegedly shared an edited image of the Red Fort with a black flag to radicalise followers and signal symbolic targets," the officer further said. *—PTI*

Dual citizenship: Allahabad HC stays its own FIR order against Rahul

NEW DELHI, 18 APRIL

The Allahabad High Court stayed its earlier order directing the registration of an FIR against Congress leader Rahul Gandhi in connection with a dual citizenship case.

The court also stated that no decision could be taken without hearing the accused.

A day earlier, the Lucknow bench of the High Court had directed the UP police to register an FIR against Rahul, citing allegations that he declared his British citizenship while incorporating a company in England in 2003.

The bench of Justice Subhash Vidyarthi had also allowed the UP government to transfer the probe to a Central agency.

The direction came after the Deputy Solicitor General submitted documents sought by the court. The plea was filed by Karnataka BJP worker Vignesh Shishir, who alleged that Rahul had declared himself a UK citizen while incorporating a company, M/S Backops Ltd, in August 2003.

According to the petitioner, Rahul had voluntarily listed his nationality as British and provided a Director Identification ID along with addresses in London and Hampshire. During the hearing, deputy solicitor general SB Pandey presented Central records on the citizenship issue, while the UP government counsel VK Singh agreed that the allegations warranted investigation. The bench concluded that the material on record suggested the need for a probe into dual citizenship.

— Agencies

BANNERGHATTA WELCOMES THEM

Four cheetahs return to Karnataka after 70 years

BENGALURU, 18 APRIL

Cheetahs have returned to Karnataka after nearly seven decades, with four animals, two males and two females, brought from South Africa as part of ongoing conservation efforts.

The cheetahs arrived at Kempegowda International Airport around midnight on Friday and were received by Forest, Ecology and Environment Minister Eshwara Khandre, who went directly to the cargo terminal after arriving in the city. The animals were sourced from the Indauna Primate and Parrot Park and transported under strict supervision by veterinary experts and forest officials.

They have been moved to Bannerghatta Biological

Park, where they will remain in quarantine for 30 days in accordance with protocol. During this period, they will be closely monitored, undergo regular health checks, and be provided a prescribed diet to prevent stress and screen for infections. Officials have been directed to prioritise their safety at every stage.

Visitors are expected to view the cheetahs in designated enclosures after they clear post-import health checks, likely by late May 2026.

Cheetahs, locally known as "Sivangi", once roamed Karnataka's forests but were declared extinct in India in 1952.

The translocation forms part of Project Cheetah, launched in 2022, which began with the introduction of African cheetahs from Namibia to Kuno.

Unlike the wild reintroduction at Kuno National Park, this is an ex-situ conservation initiative aimed at research and public awareness.

India's cheetah population now stands at 57 following recent births. *—Salar News*

Oppn plans to move fresh notice seeking CEC's removal

NEW DELHI, 18 APRIL

Opposition parties are preparing to move a fresh notice seeking the removal of Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar, undeterred by the rejection of their earlier attempt, sources said on Saturday.

Senior leaders across parties, including the Congress, Trinamool Congress, Samajwadi Party and DMK, are in discussions, with at least five MPs drafting a new notice to initiate removal proceedings. It remains undecided whether the motion will be introduced in the Lok Sabha, the Rajya Sabha, or both, as was done previously. The renewed push follows the defeat of the Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill, 2026 in the Lok Sabha on Friday, which has emboldened the opposition to seek wider backing. Leaders are aiming to gather at least 200 MPs' signatures. "We want to make a statement... the earlier numbers were underestimated," a source said.

In earlier notices, the opposition accused Kumar of failing to maintain independence and acting under executive influence. Allegations included "proved misbehaviour", partisan functioning, obstruction of electoral fraud inquiries, lack of transparency, and enabling disenfranchisement through Special Intensive Revision exercises. He was also accused of delaying compliance with Supreme Court directions.

However, both Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla and Rajya Sabha Chairman CP Radhakrishnan rejected the notices, stating the charges did not meet the constitutional threshold. *—PTI*

Wild tusker kills Hallikere breed bull

MYSURU, 18 APRIL

A Hallikar breed bull was killed in an elephant attack at a farmhouse in Ganganadoddi village in Hanur taluk on Friday night. The incident came to light on Saturday. The bull belonged to Amzad Khan, Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha and Hasiru Sene Hanur taluk president, who urged the forest department to initiate measures to prevent such incidents and demanded compensation for the loss. Hanur Range Officer Vinayak, Forest Guard Bheemappa and others inspected the spot and recommended compensation. —*SALAR NEWS*

Belagavi man loses ₹4 lakh to cyber fraud

BELAGAVI, 18 APRIL

A resident of Udyambag in Belagavi, identified as Suresh Murve, was allegedly duped over Rs 4 lakh by cyber fraudsters. According to police, the victim received an APK file early this week from an unknown source, pretending to be a nationalised bank. Believing it to be an important banking document, Murve downloaded and opened the file on his mobile phone. Within moments, the fraudsters gained control of his device, which was used to access Murve's bank account and transfer Rs 4.28 lakh. A case has been registered. A technical analysis is being conducted to determine how the accused obtained the victim's banking details. —*SALAR NEWS*

– AI

Need to have SC bench in South: CM

Says AI can't fix systemic issues in judiciary

BENGALURU, 18 APRIL

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Saturday stressed the need to improve accessibility to the Supreme Court and said that a bench ought to be set up in South India to ensure justice.

Speaking at the 22nd Biennial State Level Conference of Judicial Officers with a theme 'Reimagining the Judiciary in the era of Artificial Intelligence', he said, the authority of a judge must never be overshadowed by the authority of an algorithm.

"Pendency of cases continues to be a serious concern that affects the timely delivery of justice. While technology can provide tools to address this, it must be complemented by systemic reforms through strengthening infrastructure, increasing judicial capacity, and modernising court processes," Siddaramaiah said.

Chief Justice of India, Surya Kant, Supreme Court Judges B V Nagarathna and Aravind Kumar and Chief Justice of High Court of Karnataka Vibhu Bakhru were among those present.

The CM said, "We stand today at a defining juncture where law and technology are no longer separate domains, but interconnected forces shaping governance, rights, and the very nature of justice itself."

Siddaramaiah said that artificial intelligence (AI) is transforming how we understand facts and interpret evidence. However, there are profound concerns from issues such as algorithmic bias.

"Opaque systems may weaken the doctrine of reasoned decisions, which lies at the heart of our judicial process," he added. "The authority of a judge must never be overshadowed by the authority of an algorithm."

Siddaramaiah said that AI-generated content, deepfakes, and synthetic data will soon force the courts "to determine what constitutes reliable evidence in a digital age".

He said he hopes that privacy will be respected as AI evolves, but noted that if the systems are not carefully designed and regulated, they may accentuate inequality.

Simultaneously, he said the AI-assisted legal research may democratise knowledge. "Judges of the future must be equipped not only with legal acumen but also with a clear understanding of technological systems," he said. —*PTI*

AI is only aid, not substitute: CJI

Tells judicial officers AI won't replace them

BENGALURU, 18 APRIL

Chief Justice of India Surya Kant on Saturday urged judicial officers not to be "afraid" of AI, saying that the technology must remain an aid, not a substitute for them.

Speaking at the 22nd biennial state-level conference of judicial officers, themed 'Reimagining the Judiciary in the Era of Artificial Intelligence', organised by the Karnataka State Judicial Officers Association, he said that Artificial intelligence must be guided by a principle of balance.

"What do you do when a case involving very complicated facts and complex questions of law is placed before you? You apply more thought, spend more time, exercise greater patience, and feel a sense of satisfaction when you decide such a case," he said. "The same will happen with AI tools when we begin using them carefully and consciously, ensuring that the judge within you remains independent and is not influenced by these technical tools."

Justice Kant added that AI presents both significant opportunities and serious challenges for the judiciary, as it assists legal research and reduces administrative burdens, but operates on algorithms and patterns, and cannot "engage with the ethical, social, and moral dimensions that frequently underpin judicial decision-making".

"The process of judging is not merely analytical—it is also reflective, contextual, and guided by constitutional values. An over-reliance on AI tools risks reducing this nuanced exercise to a mechanical output, thereby diluting the depth, independence, and integrity of judicial reasoning," he said.

Meanwhile, Supreme Court judge Justice BV Nagarathna said that the future of justice must be determined by judges, and not AI.

"The rule of law is not a technical concept; it is a moral and constitutional commitment that ensures fairness, equality, and accountability," she stated.

Speaking at another conference, Justice Kant said that energy justice is the "moral architecture" for the country's growth and stated that the economic growth must be synchronised with ecological sensibility.

Justice Kant also told the Lokayakuta to harness technology. —*PTI*

CM Siddaramaiah, Chief Justice of India Surya Kant and others during the 22nd Biennial State Level Conference of Judicial Officers on 'Reimagining the Judiciary in the Era of Artificial Intelligence' in Bengaluru, on Saturday —*MOHAMMED ASAD*

Sugarcane farmers allege North-South pricing discrimination

MYSURU, 18 APRIL

Sugarcane farmers protested outside the Deputy Commissioner's office in Mysuru on Saturday and demanded a uniform sugarcane pricing policy in the State. They alleged that there was a gap of nearly Rs 800 per tonne between northern and southern parts of Karnataka.

They said that they would stage an indefinite dharana if their demands were not met within 10 days.

Led by Sugarcane Growers' Association head Hallikerehundi Bhagyaraj, the farmers urged the State government to ensure that sugar factories held up their end of the 2025 directive from the State government.

Following widespread unrest last year after sugar prices collapsed, the State government said that sugarcane prices would be raised by Rs 100 per tonne, with the government bearing Rs 50 and factories bearing the other half.

However, the protesting farmers alleged that mills such as the Bannari Sugar Factory had not held up their end of the deal and had not released the pending amounts.

They also accused government officials of colluding with factory owners.

Earlier, State Sugarcane Growers Association State unit President Kurubur Shanthakumar had noted that mills in North Karnataka had already released the amount. —*Salar News*

BJP, CM spar over delimitation, women's reservation

BENGALURU, 18 APRIL

BJP leaders accused the Congress of holding back the empowerment of women after a a Constitution Amendment Bill to implement 33 per cent reservation for women in legislatures from 2029 and increase the number of Lok Sabha seats to 816 was defeated on Friday in the Parliament.

Leader of Opposition in the State Assembly R Ashoka said that the Congress was "playing tricks" by linking the women's reservation to the delimitation exercise. By contrast, Chief Minister said that the Centre was "playing politics" because the delimitation exercise would disenfranchise Southern States, and so the opposition INDI alliance had to vote against the Constitutional amendment, even though the Congress was for women's empowerment.

"The Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam Bill should truly have passed unanimously without any opposition," Ashoka said at a press conference. "But Congress played a trick and defeated the bill. The party should dissolve the Women's Congress block as Congress has crushed women's dreams. The women's community of the country will never forgive the Congress."

He said that women's power was just one step away, but now the Congress "true face has been revealed, alleging that the party was against women's reservation.

Siddaramaiah refuted the allegations.

"We are not opposed to women's reservation. The legislation on this was passed in Parliament in 2023. They (the central government) should implement it, that's all. Let them implement it in the next election," Siddaramaiah told press.

But because the Centre "tried to mix delimitation with women's reservation, the Bill faced defeat"

"The Narendra Modi government's delimitation model is designed to punish developed states while rewarding sick states that are mired in corruption and misgovernance," he stated. "In a delimitation based solely on population, Southern states will lose their voice in Parliament. Our State too will not accept this model."

The bill required two-thirds majority to pass.

—*Salar News with Agencies*

BJP leaders Chaluvadi Narayanaswamy, R Ashoka and others hold up posters alleging that the Congress had betrayed women by voting against a Constitution Ammendment Bill in the Lok Sabha—*@RASHOKABJP*

Raichur: 2 kids die as arch collapses during play

RAICHUR, 18 APRIL

Two children died on Saturday after a portion of an arch allegedly collapsed on them while they were watching an outdoor play in Raichur district, police said. The incident occurred in Bail Marchad village in Manvi taluk, they said.

Seven people were sitting under the arch watching the play when the structure suddenly collapsed, killing two children on the spot, police said. The deceased have been identified as Vishwanath Ramalinga, 8, and Sanvita. 2. Vishakshi. 25; Lakshmi. 18; Vishalakshi, 25; Yallamma. 3; and Bassamma, 45, were injured in the incident and were shifted to Raichur Institute of Medical Sciences Hospital for further treatment, police said.

The bodies have been moved to the mortuary of Manvi Government Hospital, they added.

A case has been registered at Manvi Police Station. —*PTI*

– AI

NEVER TOO HOT FOR CRICKET

Cricket fans marshall through the heat to watch the RCB vs DC match at M Chinnaswamy Stadium on Saturday—*MOHAMMED ASAD*

3 HELD FOR SEXUALLY HARASSING THIRD-GENDER PERSON

MYSURU, 18 APRIL

Metagalli Police have arrested three youths for allegedly abducting and sexually harassing a member of a gender and sexual minority community on Saturday. Based on a complaint filed by Seetha, who falls under a third-gender identity, Metagalli police have arrested three youths, identified as Pavan, Harsha, and Susheel. Police have launched an operation to nab the other accused, Murali, absconded after the incident. The accused allegedly abducted Seetha on Friday and attempted to sexually harass her after taking the victim to a secluded place. The arrest was made within 24 hours of the incident. —*Salar News*

DURING ROUTINE EXERCISE

Parachute malfunction injures 2 soldiers in Ballari

BALLARI, 18 APRIL

- The incident occured in during a routine training exercise in the PD Halli area of Ballari. As a result of a technical issue, two soldiers crashed into a field and sustained fractures

Two Indian Air Force personnel were seriously injured during a parachute training exercise on the outskirts of Ballari on Friday morning after they fell from a height of approximately 50 feet due to a technical issue at landing.

"Both soldiers sustained leg fractures from the impact of the fall." said police.

The incident took place in the PD Halli area where 417 personnel were taking part in a training camp. During a routine jump from an aircraft, a technical issue reportedly occurred during the landing phase, Ballari Superintendent of Police Dr Suman D Pennekar told Salar News. The two soldiers crashed directly into an agricultural field.

Both soldiers were given first aid locally and later airlifted by a military helicopter from the ITI College ground in Ballari to a military hospital in Bengaluru for advanced treatment. One of the injured has been identified as Chinnaraj, 25 and the identity of the other was not immediately clear.

The Indian Air Force has not yet issued a detailed statement on the cause of the technical issue.

The PD Halli region has been used for parachute training exercises for several years, and officials termed Friday's mishap during the landing phase as rare. —*Salar News*

The Indian Airforce is yet to issue a detailed statement after two soldiers fractured their legs after an alleged parachute malfunction, in Ballari, on Friday —*x*

BJP using women as decoy: Priyanka

She says BJP wants to remain in power and is using women's quota to push for delimitation

NEW DELHI, 18 APRIL

Congress MP Priyanka Gandhi Vadra has strongly alleged that the government's push for women's reservation was a "conspiracy" to retain power permanently by linking it to delimitation, using women as a "political decoy".

She claimed the proposal was "not about women's reservation" but about reshaping constituencies to the ruling party's advantage ahead of the 2029 elections. Referring to remarks by Home Minister Amit Shah in the Lok Sabha, Gandhi said his assertion that the Congress would remain out of power for years exposed the government's mindset. "The whole conspiracy was to permanently stay in power," she said.

Gandhi further alleged that the BJP was attempting to avoid delimitation after a caste census and instead carry it out "according to its wishes" under the guise of women's rights. She accused the Prime Minister and Home Minister of suggesting that the opposition would be unable to win elections if it resisted the move.

"They thought that if the bill passes, it would be their victory, and if it fails, they would brand the opposition anti-women," she said, adding that the BJP was trying to project itself as a "messiah of women".

Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra during a press conference at the party's headquarters in Delhi—*PTI*

"The BJP wanted to do this to prove itself as the messiah of women. But it is not easy to become the messiah of women. We saw what happened to women in Hathras, what happened to our Olympic medallists and others," she said. The Congress leader added that the entire country had seen how the Modi government is defeated when the opposition unites.

She dismissed claims that the opposition would be labelled anti-women, asserting that the public could "see through their narrative".

Congress leader Jairam Ramesh reiterated the party's support for immediate implementation of women's reservation, accusing the Government of India under Narendra Modi of "flip-flopping" and attempting "insidious" changes to the federal structure.

The Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill, which proposed 33 per cent reservation for women and an increase in Lok Sabha seats to 816 by 2029, was defeated with 298 votes in favour and 230 against. —*PTI*

> **The BJP's downfall has begun. We have defeated the BJP. They have been humiliated. They do not have a majority on their own. They are sitting in power with the support of others**
>
> -Mamata Banerjee, West Bengal Chief Minister

> **PM Modi, and Home Minister Amit Shah told the nation a lie in the Parliament. They said they were trying to pass a bill for women's representation. They transformed the electoral map of Assam and Jammu and Kashmir and they intend doing it in other states**
>
> -Rahul Gandhi, Congress leader

OPPOSITION, BJP AT WAR POST DELIMITATION BILL DEFEAT

NEW DELHI, 18 APRIL

The BJP and the Opposition on Saturday engaged in a war of words over the issue of the implementation of bill on delimitation.

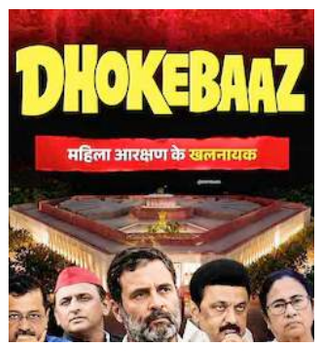
The Opposition accused the government of delaying the implementation of women's reservation bill the by linking it with delimitation to create more seats in the northern states than the southern states.

While the BJP termed the development a "black day" and accused the Congress and other Opposition parties of betraying women, the Congress and its allies asserted that the quota law, passed in 2023, should be implemented immediately.

Parliamentary Affairs Minsiter Kiren Rijiju accused the Congress of being anti-women, and said it will have to face their wrath across the country.

Union minister Shobha Karandlaje targeted Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi, alleging that the Opposition's actions had undermined both women's empowerment and regional representation.

Opposition leaders accused the government of delaying implementation of the women's reservation bill and using the issue for political gain in Assembly elections in West Bengal and Tamil Nadu. —*PTI*



BJP shares 'Dhokebaaz (traitor' poster against Opposition —*PTI*

Lok Sabha, Rajya Sabha adjourned sine die

NEW DELHI, 18 APRIL

The Lok Sabha was adjourned sine die on Saturday after a stormy Budget session that saw the defeat of a crucial bill to implement 33 per cent quota for women in legislatures.

The session, which began on 28 January, saw the passage of the Union Budget and Demands for Grants.

As soon as the House met, Speaker Om Birla read out his concluding remarks, following which he adjourned the House sine die (for an indefinite period).

The session concluded with a rendition of 'Vande Mataram'.

Birla said 31 sittings were held during the session. The productivity of the House during the session was 93 per cent.

The Rajya Sabha was adjourned sine die, concluding the Budget session that began on 28 January, with Chairman CP Radhakrishnan noting a remarkable 110 per cent productivity. —*PTI*

—WIKIPEDIA

Women's Bill: T'gana BJP Chief under house arrest

HYDERABAD, 18 APRIL

Telangana BJP alleged that party chief N Ramchander Rao was placed under house arrest on Saturday to prevent a planned protest at Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy's home, over Congress' alleged role in the women's quota bill. Slamming Congress for "stalling" the Bill—which also proposed increasing parliamentary seats." Alleging the party denied women representation in the Lok Sabha, he urged women in Telangana to "drive away" Congress leaders for the injustice. BJP confirmed the detention in a post on X.—*PTI*

Ex-Bihar BJP leader to launch party

NEW DELHI, 18 APRIL

RK Singh plans to launch his own political party, five months after quitting BJP, focusing on "national and public interest. Dynamite News reported that, Singh, a former IAS officer who became Union home secretary minister in the Modi government, said his proposed party will bring together "honest, educated and caste-free" individuals. The said the party will focus on Bihar politics. The former Lok Sabha MP from Arrah said he was suspended because of his tendency to "speak out" on certain issues, after which he decided to quit the party. Referring Modi, Singh said he was allowed in the Union government despite his outspoken views. —*PTI*

HC quashes professors' appointment as presiding officers in WB polls

Former cricketer Mohammad Azharuddin campaigns for Congress nominee Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury in the Baharampur Assembly constituency in West Bengal's Murshidabad district on Saturday —*PTI*

KOLKATA, 18 APRIL

The Calcutta High Court has set aside the appointment of some assistant professors as presiding officers by the Election Commission for the two-phase assembly elections in West Bengal.

The petitioners, belonging to the West Bengal Government College Teachers' Association, filed the application, challenging their appointment as presiding officers in polling booths for the assembly polls scheduled on 23 and 29 April.

The petitioners claimed that they are holding posts of assistant professors, but have been assigned the work of presiding officers without considering their pay level.

Justice Krishna Rao set aside and quashed the appointments of the professors, who are the petitioners, as presiding officers for the state assembly election, holding that the authorities failed to produce any document to show the unavoidable circumstances based on which the appointments were made.

The court said on Friday that the assistant professors have been appointed as presiding officers in violation of a circular of the Election Commission dated 16 February, 2010.

In their plea, the petitioners claimed that the circular on requisition of staff for election purposes mentioned that Group A equivalent senior officers. —*PTI*

> **Mamata Banerjee has earmarked the entire treasury of Bengal for Bangladeshi Muslim infiltrators. We have to remove her as Bengal CM, else one day Bangladeshi Muslims will take away the state from us**
>
> -Himanta Biswa Sarma, Assam Chief Minister

Weapons seized in Kolkata

The Kolkata Police's special task force seized a cache of arms and ammunition near Rajabazar Science College here and detained a man. Acting on suspicion, STF sleuths intercepted the man, carrying a bag, near a bus stand and recovered six single-shot firearms and 14 cartridges from him. Investigators are trying to ascertain where the arms were being taken and to whom they were meant to be delivered. The enforcement agencies recovered large amounts of unaccounted cash from Kolkata and Howrah. —*PTI*

'Fire lit by me scorched Delhi's arrogance'

DINDIGUL, 18 APRIL

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin has said the fire he ignited over the delimitation exercise issue has "scorched" Delhi's arrogance, dealing a "severe blow" to the BJP and even Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

In a major setback to the union government, a Constitution Amendment Bill to implement 33 per cent reservation for women in legislatures in 2029 and increase the number of Lok Sabha seats to 816 from the current 543 was defeated on Friday.

This was perhaps the first defeat faced by Modi in his twelve years in office, Stalin claimed and that total annihilation would follow in the 23 April Assembly election in Tamil Nadu.

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin distributes sweets among supporters during a public meeting following election campaigning, in Dindigul, Tamil Nadu on Saturday—*PTI*

Addressing a poll rally here in support of the DMK-led Secular Progressive Alliance candidates, Stalin, also the DMK President, said this was also "a massive pre-poll defeat for AIADMK general secretary Edappadi K Palaniswami.

At a poll campaign in Theni, Stalin said the bill's defeat in Parliament was just a "trailer."

"More victories will follow us. We will win over 200 seats," he said.

Stalin said the "victory" to defeat the delimitation bill was possible only because of the MPs of all opposition parties, including those in the INDIA bloc. He also thanked Congress leaders Sonia Gandhi and Mallikarjun Kharge. He also applauded Congress leader, Rahul Gandhi, who stated in that there is absolutely no connection between the two bills. —*PTI*

PM KNOWS HE CAN'T CONTROL STALIN, SAYS RAHUL GANDHI

RANIPET, 18 APRIL

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Saturday claimed that Prime Minister Narendra Modi knew that he could not control or pressurise Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin, as he was independent, and hence wanted the AIADMK to capture power so that he could exercise his control over the state.

The Prime Minister could continue dreaming, but the reality will be strikingly visible on the day the Tamil Nadu Assembly election results were announced (on May 4) when the DMK-Congress combine would sweep the polls in the state, he said.

Addressing a poll rally here, Rahul said no matter what he does, the prime minister cannot control the current chief minister of TN, M K Stalin.

He alleged that Prime Minister Narendra Modi was being "controlled" by US President Donald Trump.

The prime minister "handed out our energy security and gave away our data, besides selling our farmers and small and medium industries," he said.

Rahul Gandhi further alleged that the Prime Minister and Union Home Minister Amit Shah "lied" to the nation claiming they were attempting to pass a bill for women's quota.

However, hidden behind such a claim was a "diabolic idea" of a bid to change the nation's electoral map and weaken states. An "anti-national act was attempted and it was against the union of states," he alleged. —*PTI*

FORMER TN CM PALANISWAMI SEEKS RE-ELECTION FROM EDAPPADI

SALEM, 18 APRIL

Electoral veteran and former chief minister K Palaniswami is seeking a sixth term from his home constituency of Edappadi, where he has consistently secured resounding victories. Elections for the Tamil Nadu Assembly will be held on 23 April.

Palaniswami, the general secretary of AIADMK, has won the seat five times, most recently in 2021. Free from anti-incumbency and bolstered by growing regional popularity and an expanding support base, Palaniswami appears poised for victory.

Palaniswami faces a contest against DMK debutant C Kasi, a textile merchant, and Priyadarshini of the Naam Tamilar Katchi, though 15 candidates are in the fray. The Edappadi constituency became popular after Palaniswami, the son of the soil, became chief minister in February 2017 following the demise of party supremo J Jayalalithaa after prolonged hospitalisation.

- Palaniswam won the seat five times, most recently in 2021. Free from anti-incumbency and an expanding support base, Palaniswami appears poised for victory.

"After former CM Karunanidhi came Stalin, and now his son Udhayanidhi is set to take over. One family continues to dominate both party and governance—do you want them ruling Tamil Nadu?" Palaniswami asked. —*PTI*

Ex-UP minister's son, 2 others held for sexual assault

MUZAFFARNAGAR, 18 APRIL

Two men, including the son of a former Uttar Pradesh minister, were arrested on Saturday for allegedly sexually assaulting a 24-year-old woman and using abusive language, police said. The incident took place on Friday. The accused were identified as Aryaman Raghuvanshi, 28, son of former BJP MLA Sudhir Kumar Baliyan, and Shaurya Gupta, 18. Following a complaint filed by the victim's brother, the authorities inspected the CCTV footage and identified the suspects. The accused was driving under the influence and sexually assaulted the woman in the Nai Mandi area here, SP (city) Amrit Jain said. A case was filed and both accused arrested. —*PTI*

LITMUS TEST

Samrat's Bihar govt to face trust vote on 24 April

PATNA, 18 APRIL

Newly sworn-in Chief Minister Samrat Choudhary-led NDA government in Bihar will seek a vote of confidence in the Assembly on 24, an official notification said on Saturday.

It will be a one-day session ahead of the monsoon session of the Assembly in July, sources said.

Choudhary was sworn in as the 24th Chief Minister of Bihar on 15 April, marking the first instance of a member of the BJP assuming the top post in the state.

Choudhary succeeded Nitish Kumar, who resigned from the post to take up central responsibilities.

Bihar CM Samrat Choudhury —*PTI*

On 10 April, Nitish Kumar took oath as a member of the Rajya Sabha, marking the end of his two-decade rule in the eastern state and paving the way for a new CM.

Choudhary, 57, has been in politics for nearly three decades, though he joined the BJP only nine years ago.

Former Bihar chief minister Nitish Kumar held a courtesy meeting on Saturday with his successor Samrat Choudhary.

Kumar arrived at the chief minister's residence at 5 Deshratna Marg, Patna, where the meeting lasted approximately 20 minutes.

The meeting comes amid heightened security concerns. Shortly after assuming office, Choudhary received a death threat, following which police arrested the accused, identified as Shekhar Yadav, in Ahmedabad. —*Agencies*

Bihar Dy CMs to get Z category security cover

PATNA, 18 APRIL

Meanwhile the Bihar government has heightened security arrangements for Deputy Chief Ministers Vijay Kumar Choudhary and Bijendra Prasad Yadav, officials said on Saturday.

Both the deputy CMs will now be provided Z category security cover, according to a notification issued by the state's home department.

The decision was taken after the department reviewed the security apparatus of Choudhary and Yadav, an official said.

The Z category security comprises a dedicated team of trained personnel, equipped with advanced weapons.

Former Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, who is now a member of the Rajya Sabha, was recently provided Z-plus security cover by the state government.

- Both the deputy CMs will now be provided Z category security cover, according to a notification issued by the state's home department. The decision was taken after the department reviewed the security apparatus of Choudhary and Yadav.

"Z-plus is the highest level of security provided by the government," the official said.

BJP got its first BJP-laed government with Samrat Choudhury taking oath as the Chief Minister on 15 April.

He is the 24 Chief Minister to take oath. —*Agencies*

Bomb attack on BJP workers: CPI(M) cadres get 25 yrs jail

KANNUR, 18 APRIL

A sessions court here on Saturday sentenced 10 CPI(M) cadres for varying jail terms under different sections for a total of 25 years for attempting to murder RSS-BJP workers by throwing a bomb at their vehicle back in November 2011.

The Taliparamba court sentenced the 10 to varying jail terms under various provisions of the IPC and the Explosives Act, public prosecutor U Rameshan said.

The court directed the second accused, T V Binu also known as Urumban Binu, to serve the sentences consecutively, as he was the one who threw the bomb, and therefore, he will remain in jail for 25 years. The other accused will have to serve only 10 years as their sentences. —*PTI*

BMC unveils new device to curb mosquitos

MUMBAI, 18 APRIL

The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) has launched 'Movitrap', an innovative mosquito-control device to combat vector-borne diseases like malaria and dengue, officials said on Saturday. Developed by a startup under the Society for Mumbai Incubation Lab to Entrepreneurship (SMILE) Council, the electricity-free device targets mosquito breeding at the source by using a mild insecticide to destroy eggs, effectively interrupting the reproduction cycle. According to the release, 'Movitrap' is designed to prevent mosquito breeding at the source by attracting female mosquitoes to lay eggs in treated water, where the eggs are destroyed using a mild insecticide. The product is intended primarily for homes. —*PTI*

'Godman' Kharat sent to judicial custody

NASHIK, 18 APRIL

A court in Maharashtra's Nashik on Saturday remanded self-styled godman Ashok Kharat to judicial custody till 30 April, in a fourth case of sexually assaulting and exploiting a woman. The court had earlier remanded Kharat in the custody of the Special Investigation Team (SIT) in this case till 18 April. After Kharat's custody in this case, he was produced before Chief Judicial Magistrate (CJM) BN Ichpurani. During the hearing, the police sought Kharat's judicial custody. Accordingly, the CJM remanded him in judicial custody. He will be sent to the Nashik Road Central Jail. The victim in this particular case had come to Kharat in the hope of finding a solution to her family problems. —*PTI*

Keralam tribal dies after consuming 'arishtam'

WAYANAD, 18 APRIL

A 38-year-old tribal man died after consuming 'arishtam' reportedly laced with intoxicants, prompting protests by locals and police action, officials said on Saturday. The deceased, Prasad, a native of the Kallumottankunnu tribal hamlet in Cheryamkolli under Padinjarethara panchayat, died while undergoing treatment at Kozhikode Medical College Hospital. Hospital authorities indicated that excessive alcohol consumption, along with the intake of 'arishtam', might have caused complications leading to his death. 'Arishtam' is a traditional Ayurvedic tonic. Locals alleged the product, sold as an Ayurvedic medicine, was being misused as an intoxicant. A CPI(M) leader said the outlet operated without a pharmacist, leading to its temporary closure in the past. —*PTI*

—*INSTAGRAM*

Scorpions' 'Coming Home' India tour cancelled

NEW DELHI, 18 APRIL

German hard rock band Scorpions, known for hit tracks such as 'Wind of Change', has cancelled its shows in India due to "unforeseen medical circumstances affecting the band members". The "Coming Home" India Tour was produced and promoted by BookMyShow Live. The band was set to perform in Shillong on 21 April at JN Stadium, followed by stops at Delhi-NCR on 24 April at HUDA Grounds, Bengaluru on 16 April at NICE Grounds and Mumbai on 30 April at Jio Gardens, BKC. "We apologise for the inconvenience and disappointment caused to fans. All the tickets purchased on bookmyshow will be automatically refunded within 7-10 working days," BookMyShow stated. —*PTI*

Protests hit Manipur, CM says situation sensitive

Child panel asks people not to involve minors in protests

IMPHAL, 18 APRIL

Protests broke out across Manipur's Valley on Friday night, with large crowds taking to the streets in Imphal East over the killing of two children in the Tronglaobi incident.

Night protests erupted at Khurai Lamlong Bazar in Imphal East, where large numbers of people defied curfew and took out rallies. The situation soon turned tense, with security forces stepping in to control the crowd. Tear gas shells and mock bombs were used to disperse protesters, and several people were injured. The injured were taken to the Jawaharlal Nehru Institute of Medical Sciences (JNIMS).

Authorities have allowed limited curfew relaxation in parts of the valley. In Imphal East, Imphal West, Thoubal, and Kakching, restrictions have been eased from 5 am to 5 pm. In Bishnupur, where the incident took place and where protests are most intense, movement is allowed only between 5 am and 10 am.

People block a road in protest after two children were killed and their mother was injured in a bomb attack, in Bishnupur district, Manipur —*PTI*

Meanwhile, Manipur Chief Minister Y Khemchand Singh said on Saturday that law and order remains sensitive but under control.

Singh made the remarks after a meeting with Assam Rifles IGAR (South) at the secretariat.

"The briefing by IGAR (South) Major General Gaurav Sharma at the secretariat today reaffirmed that the law and order situation in the state is under control," the chief minister said in a Facebook post.

- Night protests erupted at Khurai Lamlong Bazar, where people defied curfew and staged rallies. The situation became tense, and the police tried to control the crowd

The Manipur Commission for Protection of Child Rights has appealed to the people not to involve minors in protests, as their participation is inappropriate.In a statement titled "statutory advisories," the panel said it has taken suo motu cognisance of an incident in which a pre-nursery student below four years was injured during a protest in Singjamei Kakwa Ashem area on Thursday night.

The child did not take part in the demonstration, but was near the protest site, the commission said. — *Agencies*

Flights resume from Pune airport after IAF jet snag

PUNE, 18 APRIL

Flight operations resumed at Pune airport on Saturday after the runway was cleared after an overnight closure caused by a technical snag in an IAF fighter, officials said.

A fighter aircraft had a technical problem in the undercarriage during landing at around 10.25 pm on Friday, causing the runway to be blocked, Pune airport director Santosh Dhoke said in a statement.

"As per SATCO, IAF, the aircraft became immobilised. Both pilots are safe. Due to the aircraft's position and damage, a NOTAM was issued for temporary runway closure until 5.30 am, later extended to 9 am to facilitate safe removal, inspection, and restoration," he said.

Earlier on Friday night, the IAF had stated that the runway at Pune airport was temporarily unavailable following an incident involving one of its aircraft. The aircrew are safe, and there is no damage to civil property, it had said.

Later in a post on X, the IAF said, "The runway has now been restored and declared operational. All safety inspections and clearances have been completed. Operations are resuming in a phased manner."

Dhoke said the IAF aircraft was removed from the runway at around 5.45 am, and the runway declared fit for operations. — *PTI*

TCS' Nida cites pregnancy, seeks anticipatory bail

NASHIK, 18 APRIL

A female employee of the TCS unit in Nashik, accused in a case of alleged forced religious conversion and sexual harassment of some women colleagues at the office, moved an anticipatory bail application on Saturday, citing her two-month-old pregnancy.

The suspect, Nida Khan, said that the charges invoked against her attract less than seven years of punishment. Her plea will be heard by the Nashik sessions court on Monday.

Nida's lawyer denied the charges, saying she cannot be accused of outraging the modesty of women.

Nashik Police Commissioner Sandip Karnik said that Nida is accused only in a case of religious harassment.

Meanwhile, a victim told the police that one of the suspects sexually assaulted her four years ago after concealing his earlier marriage, insulted her religion and also pressured her to embrace Islam. As per a FIR based on a complaint filed by a woman, she met one of the suspects, who had graduated from the same college as her, four years ago. The suspect promised to help her secure a job at TCS, she told the police. In July 2022, he forced himself upon her when they met in the Deolali Camp area expressing a desire to marry her, the complaint said.

The woman joined TCS where the suspect also worked. In February 2026, the complainant found out that the accused was a married man with two children.

When the complainant confronted him, the suspect said that he had no intention of marrying her and also insulted her Hindu religion. — *PTI*

Amravati case: NCW wants girls' videos removed

NEW DELHI, 18 APRIL

The National Commission for Women (NCW) expressed concern over the circulation of obscene videos of young girls in Maharashtra's Amravati district and directed the authorities to ensure its removal from online platforms.

On 17 April, NCW Chairperson Vijaya Rahatkar assessed the case.

Amravati police have arrested eight people so far in connection with the circulation of obscene videos and photographs of girls on social media. The probe began after videos were noticed on some websites on 11 April. Rahatkar also raised questions about the adequacy of the rules invoked and sought clarification on why stringent sections were not applied.

She also pointed to discrepancies between media reports and the status of recovered digital content. She directed the authorities to intensify efforts to retrieve all material and examine whether there was any financial angle involved, including possible commercial exploitation through digital means.

She also sought details regarding any potential links between the accused and the premises where the incidents took place. — PTI

'HC MUST SHIELD DIST COURTS'

SC tells HCs to avoid publicly criticising junior judges

NEW DELHI, 18 APRIL

The Supreme Court has cautioned High Courts against the growing tendency to publicly criticise subordinate judicial officers, observing that "the High Court is expected to act as the guardian of officers in the district judiciary."

Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta made the observation while setting aside a Calcutta High Court order cancelling an accused's bail in a tenancy-related criminal case.

The SC said the dispute was mostly civil in nature and that the high court was not justified in cancelling a bail order after nearly eight years on technical grounds.

"It has become a recent trend to castigate judicial officers and record adverse remarks/strictures against them in judicial orders passed by the high court in the exercise of supervisory, appellate or revisional jurisdiction. The high court, being a court of record in the state, is expected to act as the guardian of officers in the district judiciary," the bench said.

The SC also said that while finding infirmities in the order passed by a judicial officer, the immediate reaction ought not to be to make adverse or disparaging observations against the concerned officer in a judicial dispensation.

"Such disparaging remarks/strictures may ruin the career of the judicial officer in addition to demoralising the district judiciary as a whole. The power of superintendence conferred upon the high courts by Article 227 of the Constitution ought not to be used as a tool of oppression but rather as a mechanism for nurturing and guiding judicial officers in the state," the bench said.

The SC said that in some high courts, an in-house mechanism is already in place to take care of a situation whenever any flaw or infirmity is noted in any order passed by the trial judge while exercising the supervisory jurisdiction. — *PTI*

'Criticism of system must not be seen as condemnation'

NEW DELHI, 18 APRIL

Supreme Court Judge Justice Manmohan said on Saturday that any criticism of the existing system should not be treated as its condemnation but rather as a suggestion.

He was speaking at a legal conclave and awards ceremony organised by the Society of Indian Law Firms (SILF) and Society of Legal Professionals (SILP) on the theme: 'Justice to all-Accessible and Affordable.'

"Last time, I spoke about improving the system, and my address was misunderstood, as if it were a condemnation of the system. When you talk about improving the system, you often have to talk about the issues in the system. When you highlight shortcomings, you do so to improve the system, not to condemn it," Justice Manmohan added. — PTI

4 Ranchi minors 'rape' girl at birthday party

RANCHI, 18 APRIL

Four minors were detained for allegedly raping a 15-year-old girl at a birthday party in Jharkhand's Ranchi, police said on Saturday. The incident took place on 31 March in Namkum police station limits. An FIR in this regard was lodged on 16 April based on the girl's statement, they said.

"All five, including the victim, were friends, and the girl had gone to attend the birthday party of one of those detained. They consumed alcohol and allegedly raped her," said Ramnarayan Singh, the officer in-charge of Namkum police station.

- All five, including the survivor, were friends. The girl had gone to attend the birthday party of one of those detained. They drank alcohol and allegedly raped her, police said

"The four, aged between 15 and 17 years, have been detained and medical examination of the girl is underway," Singh said. — *PTI*

SHABIR AGAIN HELD IN TERROR CASE

JAMMU, 18 APRIL

Separatist leader Shabir Ahmad Shah was arrested by the NIA in connection with a three-decade-old terror case and remanded to the agency's custody for 10 days by a special court on Saturday, officials said.

Shah was arrested by the Srinagar branch of the NIA on Friday in the 1996 case involving a terrorist attack on policemen during a militant's funeral, and was produced before the Patiala House Court in Delhi which allowed a three-day transit remand.

The separatist, who was recently released on bail after nearly seven years of imprisonment in other cases, was produced before the special NIA court in Jammu on Saturday, where the agency sought his custodial interrogation, the officials said.

After hearing the submissions, the officials said, the court sent him to a 10-day NIA remand, allowing investigators to question him in the 1996 case.

Shah, 72, was granted bail by the Supreme Court in a terror-funding case on 12 March and by a Delhi court in a money laundering case on 28 March. — *PTI*

Vedanta power plant blast toll rises to 23

RAIPUR, 18 APRIL

The death toll in a blast at the Vedanta power plant in Chhattisgarh's Sakti district touched 23 as two more workers succumbed on Saturday. 12 others are undergoing treatment in hospitals, officials said. Three of the injured are said to be in a critical condition, they said.

Meanwhile, industrialist Naveen Jindal said filing an FIR against Vedanta Group chairman Anil Agarwal before any investigation in connection with the incident raises serious concerns.

Industrialist Naveen said filing an FIR against Vedanta chairman Agarwal before the probe is worrying—*PTI*

Sakti SP Prafull Thakur said, "Two more injured workers died in hospitals this morning."

One of them was identified as Subrata Kumar Jana, who was admitted at the Raigarh Medical College, and the other as Upendra Sah, who was undergoing treatment at Kalda hospital Raipur, he said. Jana was a native of Medinipur in West Bengal, while Sah was from Garhwa in Jharkhand, he said. The duo had suffered around 90 per cent burns, officials said.

The explosion occurred on 14 April in a steel tube carrying high-pressure steam from the boiler to the turbine at the Vedanta power plant in Singhitarai, leaving several workers with severe burns.

Four workers died on the spot, while nine others succumbed to injuries soon after the incident. Seven more injured workers succumbed in hospitals on 15 April, while another worker died on the night of 16 April at a hospital in Raipur. — *PTI*

AFTER TERROR ATTACK

QR code to boost Pahalgam tourists' safety

PAHALGAM, 18 APRIL

The Jammu and Kashmir authorities have introduced a unique QR code-based identification system for all tourism service providers to ensure the safety of tourists in Pahalgam, which was hit by a deadly attack last year by the Lashkar-e-Taiba.

The system enables easy identification and verification of genuine and registered service providers, including pony-ride operators, hawkers, business establishments, as well as outside vendors, officials said.

The initiative is seen as a major step by the authorities to restore the confidence of those visiting the popular tourist resort in Kashmir's Anantnag district.

—*AI*

Last year's attack in the Baisaran meadow left 25 tourists and a local pony-ride operator dead.

"Each service provider has been vetted by the police, registered by the authorities and has been provided a unique QR code that contains personal information and other details about that person," an official said.

When tourists scan the code with their mobile phones, they can check complete information about the person concerned, the officials said.

The initiative acts as a proper and registered identification system that would curb fraud and ensure that no unauthorised individuals are working or claiming to be associated with tourism, they said.

The QR codes contain the service provider's name, parentage, detailed address, mobile number, Aadhaar number, registration number, operational route, and whether he or she is police-verified, the officials said.

Vendors from states other than Jammu & Kashmir, who come here to do business and earn their livelihood, have also been properly vetted by police. — *PTI*

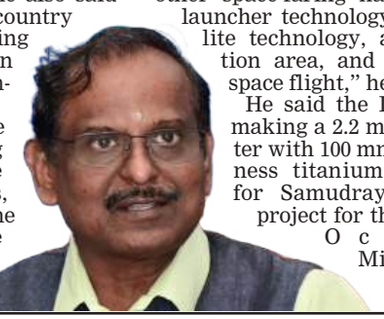
G20 satellite will be launched in 2027: ISRO

HYDERABAD, 18 APRIL

ISRO Chairman V Narayanan said on Saturday that the G20 satellite, designed to study climate, air pollution and monitor weather, is expected to be launched in 2027.

Addressing scientists from DRDO, ISRO, and the Aeronautical Society of India at the Engineering Staff College of India, he also said India is the first country to succeed in placing 104 satellites in space, using a single rocket.

"Right now we are also working on a G20 satellite for G-20 countries, India is taking the lead role, and we are going to have the launch by the 2027 timeframe," he said. He said a lot of commercial missions were carried out, including 433 satellites of 34 countries, and the heaviest satellite launched from India was again a commercial satellite.



He said ISRO is working towards sending a human to the moon by 2040. "If we do it, we will be on par with any other space-faring nation in launcher technology, satellite technology, application area, and human space flight," he said.

He said the ISRO is making a 2.2 m diameter with 100 mm thickness titanium vessel for Samudrayaan, a project for the Deep Ocean Mission. — *PTI*

SIR and UCC strengthen TMC's Muslim fortress

What looked like the first serious drift in the TMC's minority vote bank in 15 years, a month ago, now appears to turn into a renewed consolidation, with SIR deletions, the BJP's UCC promise and the collapse of the AIMIM-AJUP front potentially strengthening the ruling party's hold over Muslim voters once again.

Till March, smaller Muslim outfits, such as the ISF, AIMIM and Humayun Kabir's AJUP, which spoke of building "independent political leadership" - aided by anger over the Waqf law, OBC reservations and madrasa recruitment - seemed capable of eating into the TMC's minority base in nearly 110 Muslim-majority seats of the state.

But the mood changed dramatically after over 91 lakh names were deleted during the SIR (nearly one-third of them believed to be Muslims), followed by the break-up of the AIMIM-AJUP alliance, the purported sting video on Kabir and the BJP's promise to implement the Uniform Civil Code, political observers and minority leaders said.

They said the result is that the 2026 election is beginning to resemble 2021 once again, with large sections of minority voters rallying behind the TMC not out of enthusiasm, but out of fear that a divided vote could help the BJP.

"The minority vote had shown a sign of fragmentation in some areas. But the developments of the last three weeks have changed the mood completely. Now there is a growing feeling among minority voters that however unhappy they may be with the TMC, they cannot afford to divide their votes, which will help the BJP," political analyst Maidul Islam said.

The strongest trigger has been the SIR deletions, reducing the electorate by nearly 12 per cent. The EC has not released any religious break-up of the deleted names. But according to figures compiled by various political parties, around 34 per cent of those removed are Muslims.

That means nearly 31 lakh Muslim names may have disappeared from the rolls, a significant figure in a state where the community accounts for roughly 27 per cent of the population and around 30 per cent of voters.

The decline may appear modest in percentage terms, a little over five per cent of the minority electorate, but its political effect could be substantial. In 2021, the TMC had won 87 of the 89 seats where minorities comprised more than 30 per cent of voters, and 106 of the 112 seats where their share was around 20 per cent or more.

Any reduction in the minority electorate, therefore, hurts the TMC, and to a lesser extent, the Congress-Left alliance, because the BJP has virtually no share in that vote bank.

The impact has been most visible in minority-dominated districts that form the backbone of the TMC's electoral strength.

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has a complex and high-stakes relationship with the state's Muslim community, which makes up roughly 27% of the population *-PTI*

North 24 Parganas, with 31 assembly seats, recorded the highest deletions in the state, losing 12.6 lakh voters. South 24 Parganas, the TMC's biggest stronghold with 33 seats, saw the second-highest deletions at 10.91 lakh.

Murshidabad, where the ruling party has traditionally dominated most of the district's 22 assembly segments, recorded the third-highest deletions with 7.48 lakh names removed, while Malda, with 16 seats, lost 4.59 lakh voters.

In these districts, the SIR has produced not merely anxiety but also consolidation.

"In the beginning, some people were thinking of voting for ISF, Congress or Humayun Kabir. Now most people feel this is not the time to divide the minority vote," said Ershad Molla, a school teacher in Murshidabad.

That sense of insecurity has deepened after the BJP's manifesto promises to implement the Uniform Civil Code within six months of coming to power. Though the BJP insists the UCC means equal laws for all citizens, minority organisations have portrayed it as an attempt to interfere with Muslim personal law and identity.

Mohammed Kamruzzaman, general secretary of the All-Bengal Minority Youth Federation, who had earlier argued that smaller Muslim parties could dent the TMC's support base, said the political mood had changed sharply.

"After the SIR deletions, the UCC promise and the Humayun Kabir controversy, many minorities now believe the election has become a direct fight between the BJP and the TMC. When people feel their citizenship or voting rights are under threat, they tend to rally behind the party they see as their protector and in the absence of a viable third front, the TMC would be the biggest beneficiary," he said.

Maulana Mohammad Shafique Qasmi, Imam of Kolkata's Nakhoda Mosque, said the issue had created "deep concern" among Muslims.

- The strongest trigger has been the SIR deletions, reducing the electorate by nearly 12 per cent. The EC has not released any religious break-up of the deleted names. But according to figures compiled by various political parties, around 34 per cent of those removed are Muslims. That means nearly 31 lakh Muslim names may have disappeared from the rolls, a significant figure in a state where the community accounts for roughly 27 per cent of the population and around 30 per cent of voters.

"When they hear talk of the UCC and deleted names, they begin to feel that the bigger battle is to protect their identity and constitutional rights. Muslims are likely to vote for TMC as they will not waste their votes by voting for other parties which cannot fight communal forces," he said.

The collapse of the AIMIM-AJUP alliance has weakened the prospect of an alternative Muslim political platform. The understanding broke down after a purported video surfaced in which a man resembling Kabir was heard discussing an alleged deal with the BJP to split minority votes and weaken the TMC.

Though Kabir denied the charge and described the clip as AI-generated, the damage appears to have been done.

"Minority voters, after the SIR deletions, the UCC promise and the collapse of the Humayun Kabir experiment, increasingly feel they have no politically viable option outside Mamata Banerjee," political analyst Suman Bhattacharya said.

The Congress may still retain some influence in parts of Malda, Murshidabad and Uttar Dinajpur, where it has a traditional base and where the Left is contesting separately. The TMC believes that this renewed consolidation could blunt anti-incumbency in several closely fought constituencies.

"Just as in 2021, minorities now realise that every divided vote helps the BJP. The more the BJP speaks of UCC, infiltration and deleted names, the more minorities are returning to us," a senior TMC leader said.

BJP leader Debjit Sarkar rejected that argument and said the TMC is trying to create fear, "Our fight is against infiltrators and bogus voters, not genuine citizens. The TMC is using religion to protect its vote bank." —PTI

SALAR

Iran struggles with school closures even after truce

Mahnaz Ataei, a finance manager in Tehran, brings her 7-year-old to the office and oversees his online classes while trying to do her job.

Schools have been closed across Iran since the United States and Israel launched the war on Feb. 28, with no word on when in-person instruction will resume. The fear of airstrikes has lifted since a fragile ceasefire went into effect, but life has not returned to normal.

As with the Covid closures six years ago, it's especially difficult for working parents with small children.

"My productivity drops when I have to pay attention to both my child and my work at the same time," Ataei said. "The hardest part is trying to create balance between work and online classes, and always stressing over whether he is really learning his lessons properly."

The war killed at least 3,000 people in Iran, including more than 165 people killed in a strike on an elementary school. The ceasefire is set to expire early next week, with the US and Iran still divided on key issues like Iran's enriched uranium. A US naval blockade could further damage Iran's already cratered economy.

SAFER BUT NOT EASIER

Many parents fled Tehran with their children after the airstrikes began. But the relative safety came at the cost of disrupted routines, crowded living arrangements and financial stress. Now they are struggling to resume normal life with no idea what comes next.

"I feel like I'm suspended, neither in the air nor on the ground," said Roya Amiri, a housewife who recently returned to Tehran after fleeing with her two sons, ages 10 and 18, days after the start of the war.

The family joined hundreds of thousands of Iranians who fled the capital and other cities for safety in rural areas or the relatively unscathed north. They stayed with relatives, with 15 people living under one roof.

Tensions flared among the children as they packed into close quarters and their routines, and sleep, were disrupted. Her 10-year-old son has a respiratory illness, and they struggled to find his medication.

Schools shut down after the initial strikes, briefly resuming with online classes for a week in March before the Nowruz holiday. Online classes resumed on 4 April.

Even with the risk of renewed conflict hanging over the capital, Amiri said she felt returning to Tehran was the right decision. If war breaks out again, she plans to stay in her own home.

"I was tired of living collectively. I wanted to return to my own home and routine," Amiri said. "I missed Tehran."

Reza Jafari and his wife took their children to stay with her family in another home that soon filled with more than a dozen relatives and in-laws.

"Because the sound of explosions was distressing and my children were terrified, I left Tehran for their peace of mind," he said. "I was happy to be with relatives. It felt like a forced but valuable opportunity to reconnect."

He said the children seemed to adapt faster, surrounded by grandparents, cousins and constant activity. It was the adults who grappled with interrupted sleep, a loss of privacy, financial pressure and the exhaustion that comes from being a houseguest for weeks on end, no matter how warm the reception.

LIFE ON FAST-FORWARD

Padideh Teymourian, an architect, and her husband, Amir Ramezani, who owns a jewellery shop, have had to reorganise their lives around their 6-year-old daughter's online preschool.

Teymourian's office resumed work after the holidays and did not allow remote work, she said. Employees who failed to show up were told to apply for unpaid leave.

Their mornings begin with a rush to prepare a makeshift classroom at home. One of them has to sit beside their daughter throughout her classes, ensuring she has the right book open and is following along.

Ramezani shifted his schedule so he could remain at home during the day. Teymourian takes over in the afternoon, using hourly leave to cover the gap. "My husband's work schedule has been completely disrupted, and I also take about an hour and a half of hourly leave every day," she said.

Ramezani often returns late at night, after their daughter has gone to bed. Family dinners are rare.

"It has put economic and emotional pressure on both of us," he said. "Life is moving on fast forward … You don't even notice how the day becomes night. We're just getting through time until things go back to the way they were." —*PTI*

The war killed at least 3,000 people in Iran, including more than 165 girls in a strike on an elementary school *-PTI*

LETTERS

write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

AI 'superhacker' Mythos & Glasswing puts tech world on alert

New, more powerful artificial intelligence (AI) models are announced pretty regularly these days: the latest version of ChatGPT or Claude or Gemini always has new features and new capabilities that its makers are eager for customers to try out.

But now Anthropic has announced a new model with great fanfare, but is only giving access to a select handful of users. In what the New York Times calls a "terrifying warning sign" of the model's power, the company has instead started an initiative called Project Glasswing to use the model for good instead of evil.

Why? Early reports indicated that the model, with instruction, had been able to move outside a contained testing "sandbox" and send an email to a researcher.

A little alarming, perhaps. But more significantly, Anthropic claims Mythos has uncovered software vulnerabilities and bugs "in every major operating system and every major web browser".

FINDING HIDDEN VULNERABILITIES

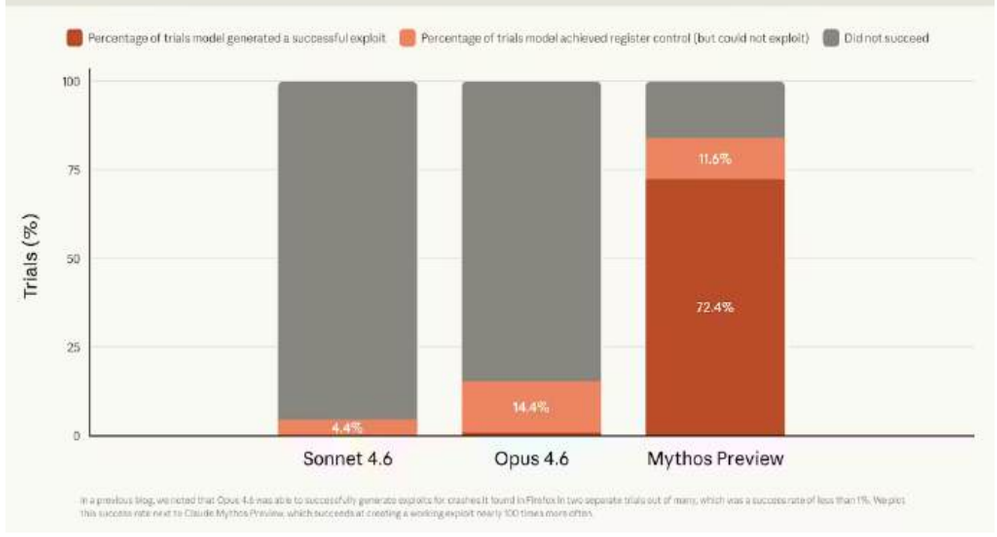
In one remarkable example, the model found a flaw in OpenBSD, a security-focused operating system used in firewalls and routers, which had gone undetected for 27 years.

According to Anthropic, it also found a 16-year-old vulnerability in FFmpeg, a little-known but widely used behind-the-scenes piece of software that helps computers, apps, and websites handle audio and video files.

Anthropic also says Mythos found several vulnerabilities in the kernel of the Linux operating system, and chained them together in a way that could give an attacker complete control of a machine.

Anthropic's internal assessment of the model highlights both its technical promise and the need for vigilance.

The report outlines a hypothetical risk that an advanced AI might exploit its access within an organisation, but concludes that the model poses a very low threat of harmful autonomous actions. In other words, it is unlikely to "go rogue" – but may follow human directions to do things that cause harm.



Anthropic's internal testing showed the Mythos model was far more successful than earlier models at turning software bugs into working exploits *-THE CONVERSATION*

WHY ANTHROPIC IS KEEPING MYTHOS OFF LIMITS

Anthropic says it decided not to release the model publicly because of its capabilities and the potential risks it poses. At the same time, the company launched Project Glasswing.

The effort brings together a broad coalition of tech companies such as Microsoft, Amazon, Google, Apple, Cisco and NVIDIA, open-source organisations such as the Linux Foundation, and major financial actors such as JPMorganChase, to channel Mythos towards cyber defence rather than misuse.

The idea is to give defenders a head start to find and fix weaknesses in critical software before similar AI capabilities become widely available to attackers.

READING BETWEEN THE LINES OF ANTHROPIC'S MESSAGES

This is not the first time an AI firm has decided a model was too powerful to release widely. In 2019, years before the ChatGPT era, OpenAI did something similar with its (now quite primitive-looking) GPT-2 model. (Dario Amodei, now chief executive of Anthropic, was a key OpenAI researcher at the time.)

However, this doesn't mean these announcements should not be taken seriously.

Anthropic has published unusually detailed material for a model it is not widely releasing. Reports suggest US authorities convened major US bank CEOs in Washington to discuss the cyber risks associated with Mythos. However, we should exercise caution about Anthropic's claims, because outsiders cannot yet verify most of the underlying evidence. Anthropic says more than 99 per cent of the vulnerabilities it found are still undisclosed because they have not yet been patched. That is responsible disclosure, but it also means the public is being asked to trust a great deal it cannot fully inspect.

WHAT MYTHOS COULD MEAN FOR THE FUTURE OF CYBERSECURITY

Cybersecurity failures can have real effects on individuals. In Australia, the Optus breach exposed the personal information of about 9.5 million people. In another case, stolen Medibank records included sensitive health information, and some of the data was later released on the dark web. These were not just database problems. They became crises of privacy, identity and trust.

That is why Mythos matters. Mythos and other AI models like it could change the basic economics of cybersecurity.

In the past, serious vulnerabilities have often stayed hidden simply because nobody found them. And this in turn was because finding them took rare skill, patience, and time.

If models like Mythos can scan the hidden plumbing of the internet – operating systems, browsers, routers, and shared open-source code – at an unprecedented scale, then what is now specialised hacking could become a routine and automated process.

For organisations and software development firms, Mythos is a double-edged sword. It could rapidly uncover hidden flaws in their own code, but it also raises the fear attackers could find the vulnerabilities first. The implications reach well beyond tech companies. Much of that underlying, invisible software supports many of the services people rely on every day, from electricity and water to airlines, banking, retail and hospitals. So far, cybersecurity and software companies have been remarkably quiet in public about Anthropic's Mythos. Many firms appear to be waiting and watching, unwilling to signal their stance in case the model exposes weaknesses in their own systems. —*The Conversation*

— ANI

Pakistan ryots protest corporate farming push

ISLAMABAD, 18 APRIL

Protests by farmers swept across more than 100 cities in Pakistan on Friday as they took to the streets over what they called the anti-farmer policies of the government and demanding urgent reforms to protect their livelihoods. The nationwide protests coincided with the Pakistan Kissan Rabita Committee's call to mark the International Day of Peasant Struggles across the country. Protests took place across Punjab, including in Lahore, Multan, Bahawalpur, Sahiwal, and Sargodha. In Sindh, demonstrations were held in Hyderabad, Sukkur, Larkana, and Thatta, reflecting widespread discontent. The protestors demanded fixing of the minimum support price (MSP) of wheat at PKR 4,000 per maund and opposed the government's plan to outsource wheat procurement to 11 private firms. —*ANI*

Pak keen for early approval of next IMF tranche: FM

ISLAMABAD, 18 APRIL

Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb, currently attending the World Bank-IMF Spring Meetings in Washington, stated that Pakistan is seeking early approval for a USD1.2 billion International Monetary Fund (IMF) tranche—comprising USD1 billion under the Extended Fund Facility and USD200 million under the Resilience and Sustainability Facility—ahead of an IMF mission scheduled to visit next month for the upcoming review. A staff-level agreement was signed last year at the completion of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) second review of the economy in 2024. Aurangzeb said on Friday at the Pakistan Embassy in Washington that the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz was a "very good development", which would ease pressure on global oil supplies, Dawn reported.—*PTI*

1st statements in Weinstein retrial set for Tuesday

NEW YORK, 18 APRIL

Opening statements are scheduled for Tuesday in the latest rape retrial of Harvey Weinstein in New York. Jury selection concluded after four days, with seven men and five women chosen to decide whether he raped a woman in a Manhattan hotel in 2013. Weinstein, 73, has pleaded not guilty, and proceedings are expected to last about four weeks. The former Hollywood producer, once a dominant figure in the film industry, has spent years contesting multiple sexual assault cases in New York and Los Angeles. His 2020 New York conviction was later overturned, and a retrial last year ended with jurors deadlocked on the rape charge. Weinstein denies all allegations and continues to appeal his convictions. He has been in custody for six years. —*PTI*

Iran warns of Naval action as Hormuz tensions deepen

Trump says US won't be blackmailed

TEHRAN/WASHINGTON, 18 APRIL

Supreme Leader Mojtaba Khamenei said that Iran's Navy "stands ready to make the enemies taste the bitterness of new defeats" as tensions over the Strait of Hormuz continue to escalate amid a fragile ceasefire.

"With its strong divine and popular support, and in dense and solid ranks, shoulder to shoulder with other warriors of the armed forces, it has confronted two armies at the forefront of disbelief and arrogance, making their weakness and humiliation evident in the eyes of the world," he said in a statement according to state-media.

His comments come as Iran said that the Strait of Hormuz would be closed "until a deal is reached", after briefly reopening it on Friday. The ceasefire with the US expires on Wednesday.

Ebrahim Azizi, head of Iran's parliamentary National Security Commission, said the Strait was returning to a controlled regime requiring vessels to obtain Iranian authorisation and pay transit tolls.

US President Donald Trump, meanwhile, said that the American blockade on Iranian ports would remain "in full force" until Tehran agrees to a deal. "Maybe I won't extend (the ceasefire), but the blockade is going to remain. So you'll have a blockade and, unfortunately, we'll have to start dropping bombs again".

He also said that the US would not be blackmailed and said that the Iran was acting "cute".

The blockade, imposed alongside last week's ceasefire, has halted shipping to and from Iranian ports. Iran described the blockade as "piracy"

Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Saeed Khatibzadeh said the US was risking both the global economy and the ceasefire. "Americans are risking the international community… through these miscalculations," he said after a diplomatic forum in Antalya, adding that Washington had not abandoned its "maximalist position".

Trump, had also suggested that the US would retrieve "all the nuclear dust", referring to uranium believed to be buried at sites damaged by US strikes last year. However, Khatibzadeh indicated Iran is not ready for direct talks, and firmly rejected US demands to hand over its 440 kg of enriched uranium, calling the proposal "a non-starter".

Separately, French President Emmanuel Macron said a French soldier was killed and three injured in an attack on UN peacekeepers in southern Lebanon, blaming Hezbollah. —*Agencies*

'47 women and girls killed daily in Gaza'

An average of at least 47 women and girls were killed everyday during Israel's attacks on Gaza, according to the UN Women on Friday. In total, at least 38,000 women and girls were killed in Gaza between October 2023 and December 2025. The agency warned that the deaths have continued six months into the fragile ceasefire, but the exact number is not clear.

US sanctions Iraqi militias with Iran ties

The US imposed sanctions on seven senior commanders of Iraqi militias that are supported by Iran, including groups like Kataib Hezbollah and Asaib Ahl al-Haq, for allegedly planning and carrying out attacks on US personnel and coalition forces in the region. Officials said that this was part of the move to counter Iran's influence, and signifies US' strategy to exert economic pressure on Iran.

UK pledges military for Hormuz security

The UK will make a "'wide-ranging military contribution" to a multinational mission aimed at securing the Strait of Hormuz, UK's envoy to Washington, Christian Turner said. Turner's comments come after France and the UK gather world leaders for a summit in Paris to open the crucial waterway. Turner said the initiative intends to ensure safe passage through the Strait and prevent the imposition of tolls.

US renews sanctions waiver for purchase of Russian oil

WASHINGTON, 18 APRIL

- The move is a boost for India, which is the second largest buyer of Russian oil after China. It comes after the US said on Wednesday that it would not renew the waiver

The US has extended by a month a waiver from sanctions to allow countries to buy petroleum products from Russia, days after it ruled out renewal of the special measure. This will likely benefit India, which is the second largest buyer of Russian oil.

The US Department of Treasury issued an order late Friday extending the waiver from sanctions on Russian oil that is already at sea on or before 17 April through 16 May.

Earlier, the US had granted an exemption from sanctions to India for buying Russian oil for a month beginning 5 March, and granted a similar waiver to other countries a few days later.

Entities in Iran, North Korea, Cuba, or parts of Ukraine were omitted from the waiver.

The previous waiver of sanctions had made available 140 million barrels of Russian oil already loaded on ships to global markets as prices soared against the backdrop of the US war with Iran. It is unclear how much oil has been waived now.

Notably, Ukraine's strikes on Russia have crippled Moscow's oil revenue, which Kyiv says is fuelling the "war machine". Reports suggest that Russia may have lost up to 40 per cent of its oil export revenues.

Democrats condemned Washington's latest waiver of sanctions, calling it a "180-degree reversal" from what Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said on Wednesday. They noted that Russia has launched massive airstrikes on Ukraine in the last week alone, killing dozens of people.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said on X that Russia was constructing roads from occupied Ukraine to Belarus, indicating that Belarus may be further committed to the war. —*PTI*

Iran-US talks to be held in Islamabad on Monday: Reports

ISLAMABAD, 18 APRIL

A fresh round of talks between Iranian and American negotiators is expected to take place in Islamabad on Monday, Iranian sources told CNN.

The delegations are likely to arrive in the Pakistani capital on Sunday, they added.

This comes as Pakistan's Chief of Defence Forces Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir concluded a three-day visit to Tehran as part of the diplomatic push. Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif similarly went on a three-nations tour to Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Qatar as part of the effort.

Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan met and discussed "international efforts aimed at de-escalation and advancing diplomatic solutions" with Sharif on the sidelines of the Antalya Diplomacy Forum in Turkey.

Pakistan PM Shehbaz Sharif, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan & Qatar Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani at the Antalya Diplomacy Forum in Turkey on Friday —*X @TAMIMBINHAMAD*

Munir, who US President Donald Trump has repeatedly praised, met several high-ranking Irania leaders during his visit in Iran.

The Islamabad Peace Talks, held on 11-12 April, ended without a breakthrough. The talks were the first high-level direct negotiations between Iran and the US since the 1979 revolution. —*Agencies*

Negotiations aren't weakness: Lebanon Prez rebukes Hezbollah

BEIRUT, 18 APRIL

President Joseph Aoun struck a defiant tone on Friday saying Lebanon would chart its own course, and that negotiations with Israel were not a sign of weakness, as the fragile ceasefire appeared to hold.

He said that Lebanon was no longer "a pawn in anyone's game, nor an arena for anyone's wars, and we never will be again", in a TV address.

Rebuffing Hezbollah, which has criticised Lebanon for holding talks with Israel, Aoun said that Lebanon will make its own decisions and stand by demands shared across Lebanese society, not ones dictated by Iran or its allies.

"There will be no concessions to any principle, no infringement of the sovereignty of this country," he said.

Displaced people wave portraits of late Hezbollah leader Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, as they return to their villages in Qasmiyeh, Lebanon —*PTI*

Meanwhile, the US State Department said President Donald Trump's announced prohibition on Israeli strikes inside Lebanon applies only to offensive attacks and not to actions taken in self-defence, and referred to the a point of the ceasefire agreement.

Israeli forces continue to obtain south Lebanon, despite the 10-day ceasefire. Israel has already violated the current ceasefire and broke previous deals with Lebanon daily. —*Agencies*

FBI chief Kash drinking everyday as he fears being sacked

WASHINGTON, 18 APRIL

FBI Director Kashyap 'Kash' Patel, considered a mainstay of the Donald Trump administration, is reportedly paranoid that he may be on the verge of losing his job as the head of the nation's top investigative agency.

A report in The Atlantic cited Patel's "excessive drinking" as one reason he feared he might be fired.

On Friday, as he prepared to leave for the weekend, Patel struggled to log into an internal computer system.

He panicked, frantically calling aides and allies to announce he had been fired by the White House, according to nine people familiar with his outreach.

Patel had not been fired. The access problem, two people familiar with the matter said, appears to have been a technical error.

- This comes after several high-ranking officials in the Trump administration, such as former Homeland Security head Kristi Noem were axed

Patel oversees an agency that employs roughly 38,000 people, including many who are trained to investigate and verify information that can be presented under oath in a court of law.

Under Trump and Patel, crime across the country has plummeted to the lowest level in more than 100 years, White House spokesperson Karoline Leavitt was recently quoted as saying. —*PTI*

Gagan Thapa-led faction official Nepal Cong: SC

KATHMANDU, 18 APRIL

The Gagan Thapa-led faction has been recognised as the official Nepali Congress by the Supreme Court, dealing a blow to Sher Bahadur Deuba.

A division bench of Justices Saranga Subedi and Nripa Dhwoj Niroula on Friday ruled in favour of the Election Commission's (EC) recognition of the current Central Working Committee (CWC) led by Thapa, myRepublica newspaper reported.

Thapa, 49, was elected as the Nepali Congress president in a special general convention from 11-14 January in Kathmandu, which was challenged by the Deuba-led faction.

Former prime minister Deuba and party's acting president Purna Bahadur Khadka had challenged the EC's decision as well as the validity of the special general convention, arguing that the recognition of the Thapa-led leadership was unconstitutional, unlawful and contrary to the party statute.

The Deuba faction later moved the Supreme Court on 18 January. —*PTI*

US, CUBA HOLD TALKS IN HAVANA

WASHINGTON, 18 APRIL

An American delegation recently met with Cuban government officials, marking a renewed diplomatic push even as US President Donald Trump has threatened to intervene. Cuba's leader said this week that his country is prepared to fight if that should happen.

A senior State Department official met with the grandson of retired Cuban leader Raúl Castro last week during the trip, according to a department official on Friday. A second US official said Secretary of State Marco Rubio was not part of the delegation that visited Havana.

It marked the first US government flight to land in Cuba other than at the US Naval Base at Guantanamo Bay since 2016. During an extraordinary diplomatic push last week, first reported by Axios, the US delegation urged Cuba to overhaul its economy and governance.

As the Trump administration pressures Cuba through an energy blockade, it has conditioned any easing of sanctions on political and economic reforms. Additionally, officials recently discussed a US proposal to provide Starlink internet access to the island, a State Department official confirmed. —*PTI*

ALONG WITH 30 OTHERS

Indian deported from US to Costa Rica

SAN JOSE, 18 APRIL

Costa Rica on Friday received a second group of migrants—including an Indian—deported from the US as part of the Trump administration's latest policy of deporting immigrants to "third countries." Under a bilateral agreement signed in March by Costa Rican President Rodrigo Chaves and US Special Envoy Kristi Noem, Costa Rica has agreed to accept up to 25 third-country nationals expelled from the US each week.

The Trump administration has struck deals with several nations in Africa and the Americas to accept third-country deportees —*x*

The first group of 25 deportees, which arrived at San Jose's Juan Santamaría International Airport on Saturday, was assisted by Costa Rican migration police in coordination with the International Organisation for Migration. A second group of third-country deportees from the US arrived in Costa Rica on Friday. The group of 30 deportees includes eight Costa Ricans, eight Brazilians, three Romanians, two Chinese nationals, three from Uzbekistan, two from Azerbaijan, one from Ireland, one from India, one from Vietnam, and one from Belarus.

The deportees will be offered the opportunity to participate in the Assisted Voluntary Return (AVR) programme administered by the International Organisation for Migration to return to their countries of origin, or to apply for legal residency in Costa Rica under humanitarian categories through the standard process.

Costa Rica is one of several countries that have signed often secretive agreements with the US to accept third-country deportees.—*PTI*

— PTI

Dish TV board appoints three directors

NOIDA, 18 APRIL

Dish TV has announced that 99.49 per cent of its shareholders have approved the appointment of three independent directors to its board — Arun Kumar Kapoor, Heena Naishadh Bhatt and Ashok Anant Paranjpe. The company said it remains focused on stabilising its core DTH operations while expanding into new verticals, including connected TV platform VZY, B2B e-commerce venture ShopZop and OTT platform Watcho. The moves are aimed at diversifying revenue streams and building a more resilient growth trajectory. The board reconstitution comes as the company works to strengthen governance structures amid its broader push into emerging digital businesses. Owned by the Zee Group, Dish TV is a leading content distribution companies.—*AGENCIES*

Iran war to impact automobile sector: FADA President

NEW DELHI, 18 APRIL

The President of the Federation of Automobile Dealers Associations (FADA) is concerned for India's automotive sector if the war is prolonged. FADA President CS Vigneshwar stated that the ongoing West Asia conflict will specifically affect export volumes and the supply oil and aluminium. Vigneshwar warned that while the domestic market's previous 13 per cent growth has provided a buffer against global volatility, slowing exports remain a key concern, and prolonged geopolitical tensions could further disrupt production and international trade. "I'm sure the government is doing everything possible to address it, but these are challenges which we need to face in the coming months if the conflict there is prolonged." Vigneshwar added.—*PTI*

Hathway Q4 net profit falls 67.7% to Rs 11.25 cr

NEW DELHI, 18 APRIL

Hathway Cable & Datacom Ltd reported a 67.7 per cent decline in its consolidated net profit to Rs 11.25 crore for the fourth quarter ended March 2026. Reliance-owned Hathway Cable reported a net profit of Rs 34.8 crore for the January-March quarter last year, according to a regulatory filing on Friday. Its revenue from operations increased 6.37 per cent to Rs 545.85 crore in the March quarter. It was Rs 513.15 crore in the year-ago period. Hathway's revenue from its Cable TV business was Rs 391.61 crore, and from broadband services was Rs 143.15 crore in Q4 of FY26. Total expenses of Hathway Cable rose 6.6 per cent to Rs 543.79 crore. —*PTI*

Govt adds 55,200 startups in FY26; 23.36L jobs created

NEW DELHI, 18 APRIL

The government recognised more than 55,200 startups during the financial year 2025-26, marking the highest annual addition since the launch of the Startup India initiative, according the Ministry of Commerce and Industry. The total number of recognised startups in the country has crossed 2.23 lakh as of 31 March,collectively generating over 23.36 lakh direct jobs. The strong growth reflects continued expansion of India's startup ecosystem over the past decade.The Startup India initiative was launched in January 2016. The number of recognised startups rose by 51.6 per cent in FY26, while direct job creation increased by 36.1 per cent. These startups are now spread across all states and Union Territories, with Maharashtra, Karnataka, Gujarat and New Delhi emerging as leading startup hubs in the country.—*PTI*

Govt clears Rs 12,980 cr maritime insurance pool for shipping

It will cover risks like hull and machinery, cargo, protection amid Iran war

NEW DELHI, 18 APRIL

In a significant decision, the Union Cabinet on Saturday approved the creation of the 'Bharat Maritime Insurance Pool' (BMI pool) with a Rs 12,980 crore sovereign guarantee to ensure uninterrupted maritime insurance coverage amid rising global uncertainties.

Information and Broadcasting Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said the pool ensures that Indian trade continues to have access to affordable insurance for vessels carrying cargo from any international origin to Indian ports and vice-versa, even when transiting volatile maritime corridors. This will be for a ten-year period, with a five-year extension.

The decision comes amid disruptions in global energy supply chains caused by the conflict in West Asia.

An official release said that there was a need for a domestic maritime risk covering pool to maintain sovereignty and continuity of trade in the wake of geopolitical tensions.

There is high dependence of Indian vessels on International Group of Protection and Indemnity (IGP&I) Club for P&I insurance covering third-party liabilities like oil pollution liability, wreck removal, cargo damage, crew injury and repatriation, Collision liabilities and so on," the release said.

The government has approved formation of 'Bharat Maritime Insurance Pool' (BMI pool) for Indian flagged or controlled vessels or vessels destined to or starting from India, backed by a sovereign guarantee.

The pool would cover all maritime risks like hull and machinery, cargo, protection and indemnity and war risk.

The policies will be issued by insurers that are pool members, using the combined underwriting capacity of the pool worth around Rs.950 crore. The Pool will help to manage liability insurance locally, tailored to Indian shipping conditions and regulatory requirements, develop specialized marine underwriting, claims management and legal expertise within India.

A governing body will oversee the formation and functioning of the pool.

The rationale behind the government's proposed domestic insurance entity is to strengthen self-reliance, sanction resilience and ensure g greater sovereign control. —*ANI*

- There is high dependence of Indian vessels on International Group of Protection and Indemnity (IGP&I) Club for P&I insurance covering third-party liabilities like oil pollution liability, wreck removal, cargo damage, crew injury and repatriation, collision liabilities and so on

The pool ensures that Indian trade continues to have access to affordable insurance for vessels carrying cargo from any international origin to Indian ports and vice versa—*REPRESENTATIVE IMAGE*

Centre expands RELIEF export scheme to Egypt & Jordan

NEW DELHI, 18 APRIL

The Ministry of Commerce & Industry has expanded the Resilience & Logistics Intervention for Export Facilitation (RELIEF) scheme to include Egypt and Jordan as eligible destinations for delivery and transhipment. This expansion comes as geo-political tensions in West Asia continue to disrupt maritime logistics across the Gulf and surrounding regions.

In addition, through a Policy Circular dated 15 April 2026, the Government has clarified the scope of Component II of RELIEF, which pertains to ECGC insurance support.

RELIEF is being implemented through ECGC as the nodal agency and includes support for insured exporters, facilitation of insurance cover for upcoming shipments, and reimbursement assistance for eligible MSME exporters facing extraordinary freight and insurance surcharge burdens.

Launched on 19 March 2026, the RELIEF scheme helps Indian exporters mitigate rising freight costs, insurance premiums, and war-related risks in the West Asian maritime corridor, providing calibrated support for both past and future shipments of the country. —*ANI*

SEC, Adanis seek more time in US court over $700M bond case

NEW YORK, 18 APRIL

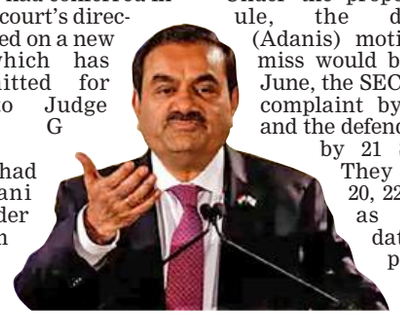
The US Securities and Exchange Commission and Indian businessmen Gautam Adani and Sagar Adani have jointly requested a US court for more time to file key submissions in a civil securities case worth USD 700 million, proposing a revised schedule for motions and responses.

In a filing before the US District Court for the Eastern District of New York, the parties said they had conferred in line with the court's directive and agreed on a new timeline, which has been submitted for approval to Judge Nicholas G Garaufis.

The SEC had sued Adani Group founder Gautam Adani and his nephew, Sagar for allegedly misleading investors by failing to disclose an alleged bribery scheme tied to Indian state officials, framing the case under US securities laws.

Denying all allegations, the two had filed a pre-motion letter ahead of a planned 30 April motion, seeking dismissal of a fraud lawsuit, arguing the case represents an impermissible extraterritorial application of US law and fails for lack of personal jurisdiction.

Under the proposed schedule, the defendant's (Adanis) motion to dismiss would be due by 8 June, the SEC's amended complaint by 7 August and the defendants' reply by 21 September. They suggested 20, 22 or 29 May as potential dates for a pre-motion conference —*PTI*



Govt toughens DGFT committees to speed up export approvals

NEW DELHI, 18 APRIL

The Ministry of Commerce and Industry has introduced a set of reforms to improve the functioning of Norms Committees under the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT), aimed at faster disposal of Advance Authorisation (AA) applications.

The Ministry said that the move comes as part of the government's broader push to enhance ease of doing business and reduce delays in approvals under export-linked schemes.

The Ministry noted that "DGFT administers the AA Scheme and the Duty-Free Import Authorisation (DFIA) Scheme under the Foreign Trade Policy. These schemes allow duty-free import of inputs that are physically incorporated in export products."

At present, seven such committees operate across sectors, comprising technical experts and officials from various ministries. —*ANI*

AT USD 91.87 PER BARREL

Oil prices retreat, world stock indices surge on US-Iran truce

NEW DELHI, 18 APRIL

Global stock markets saw oil prices drop, and stock indices soar on Saturday as investors relaxed post US-Iran ceasefire, easing immediate concerns over energy supply stability.

Market data indicated a sharp correction in the commodities sector alongside a robust rally across major equity benchmarks.

Brent Crude decline 7.57 per cent to settle at USD 91.87 per barrel, a retreat from its previous close of USD 99.39. The commodity saw an intraday low of USD 86.08, moving further away from its 52-week high of USD 114.81.

West Texas Intermediate crude oil fell by 9.63 per cent, dropping by USD 9.12 to reach USD 85.57. Gold prices gained 0.94 per cent to reach USD 4,833.56.

The US equity markets responded with broad gains. The upward movement in Western markets followed a more subdued session in the Asian markets. Other regional markets showed mixed results on 17 April.

The sharp slump in oil prices and gain in stock indices come after the Iranian side had earlier accepted US President Donald Trump's peace overture and agreed to safe passage via the Strait of Hormuz for two weeks and pause military operations.

The pause is likely to lead to further comprehensive negotiations between the US and Iran and a possible peace summit in Islamabad. —*ANI*

West Texas Intermediate crude oil fell by 9.63 per cent, dropping by USD 9.12 to reach USD 85.57—*REPRESENTATIVE IMAGE*

HDFC Bank Q4 net profit increases 8% to Rs 20,351 crore

MUMBAI, 18 APRIL

HDFC Bank on Saturday reported an 8.04 per cent rise in its consolidated net profit to Rs 20,350.76 crore for the March quarter.

The city-headquartered bank had reported a consolidated net profit of Rs 18,834.88 crore in the year-ago period.

The largest private sector lender's Q4 net profit on a standalone basis jumped 9.11 per cent year-on-year to Rs 19,221.05 crore. It had reported a net profit of Rs 18,653.75 crore in the preceding December quarter.

For the reporting quarter, its total income rose to Rs 89,809 crore in the January-March 2026 period, while the total expenditure declined to Rs 62,006 crore from Rs 62,951 crore.

HDFC Bank's Q4 net profit on a standalone basis jumped 9.11 per cent year-on-year to Rs 19,221.05 crore —*HDFC*

The gross non-performing assets ratio improved to 1.15 per cent from 1.24 per cent at the end of the preceding December quarter. The overall provisions declines to Rs 2,610 crore from Rs 3,193 crore in March quarter of 2025.

ICICI BANK Q4 NET PROFIT AT RS 14,755 CR

ICICI Bank's consolidated net profit increased by 9.28 per cent to Rs 14,755 crore in the March quarter, according to an exchange filing. —*PTI*

Meta to cut 10% of its staff in largest layoff

NEW DELHI, 18 APRIL

The Meta has decided to retrench about 8000 of its employees spread across the globe starting 20 May.

The move is likely to hit about 10 per cent of its employees, according to reports that quoted multiple sources.

To begin with the company is expected to lay off workforce in the month of May at the Facebook and Instagram parent company.

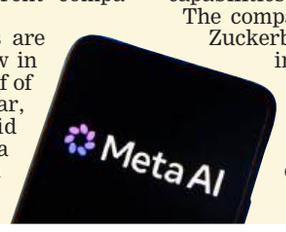
More layoffs are likely to follow in the second half of the current year, sources said adding that a decision on the number and timing are yet to be decided.

Meta was earlier reported to have decided to begin the layoff process by cutting down on 20 per cent of the its work force. It is however not clear as to the total number of layoffs being planned for this year.

The reduction in workforce has come amid the company executives' assessment of the evolution of artificial intelligence capabilities.

The company CEO Mark Zuckerberg is pumping in hundreds of billions of dollars into AI amid his plans to reshape his company.

–Agencies



Centre clears UP potato purchase at Rs 6,500/ton

NEW DELHI, 18 APRIL

The Centre has approved the procurement of 20 lakh tonnes of potatoes in Uttar Pradesh at a market intervention price of Rs 6,500.90 per tonne, which will cost the exchequer Rs 203.15 crore, as part of a broader push to protect farmers from distress sales across multiple states.

The Union Agriculture Ministry raised the procurement limit for gram in Andhra Pradesh to 1.13 lakh tonnes, up from the existing cap of 94,500 tonnes.

In Karnataka, the procurement window for tur has been extended to 15 May under the Price Support Scheme (PSS), giving farmers additional time to sell their produce at the MSP.Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan approved the proposals. —*PTI*

FIRM FACING INVESTOR SCRUTINY

Srinivas Narayan, 2 top officials exit OpenAI

NEW DELHI, 18 APRIL

OpenAI's senior executive Srinivas Narayan and two others have announced their departure as the company trims internal priorities, restructures key teams and faces mounting investor scrutiny over its leadership and strategic direction

The departures mark a significant reshuffle at the top, with Narayanan, Kevin Weil and Bill Peebles announcing their exits on 17 April.

Narayanan had served as OpenAI's chief technology officer for B2B applications for three years.

"I have decided to leave OpenAI. The last three years have been an incredible journey that felt more like ten," he wrote in a note on X.

He said he was not joining any company as of present, but will return to India to take some time off. "I am looking forward to spending some much-needed time with my aging parents in India before deciding what's next," he wrote.

Weil, who led OpenAI's scientific research initiatives said he was departing ashis team, OpenAI for Science, was merging into other research groups. He also served as the chief product officer at the company

Peebles, who headed OpenAI's AI video model Sora, was leaving as the company has decided to shut down the video model.

These exits come because OpenAI is narrowing its focus, cutting back on so-called side projects and doubling down on enterprise products.

Some OpenAI investors and board members are concerned that Sam Altman's external interests could dilute focus when OpenAI sharpening its business strategy.—*Agencies*

Srinivas Narayanan had served as OpenAI's chief technology officer for B2B applications for three years—*x*

Andhra to give Rs 40K lease per acre to Amravati farmers

AMARAVATI, 18 APRIL

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu announced a Rs 40,000 lease per acre for a decade to the farmers who offered their land under the second phase of Land Pooling Scheme in the greenfield capital city, Amaravati.

In addition to promising an annual hike of Rs 3,000 to the lease amount, the chief minister agreed to extend a Rs 1.5 lakh crop loan per household, said a press release issued on Saturday.

On 10 April, Municipal Minister P Narayana said 31,150 farmers in total gave nearly 34,983 acres of land, which also included the 1,000 acres given by Pedaparimi village farmers under LPS.

Farmers from 10 villages in the Tadikonda and Pedakurapadu constituencies called on the CM on Friday.

Farmers from 10 villages in the Tadikonda and Pedakurapadu constituencies called on the CM on Friday.

Including the farmers' land, the southern state has already pooled 54,000 acres in Amaravati. It initiated the second phase of LPS for another 40,000 acres, beginning with 16,666 acres from seven villages. These are meant to supplement the initial 54,000-acre land bank. —*PTI*

Chandrababu Naidu —*PTI*

Even in the scorching heat, cricket fans arrive to watch an IPL match between RCB and DC by covering their head with cloth and using caps, in Bengaluru on Saturday –MOHAMMED ASAD

DC beat RCB in thriller

Miller takes Delhi home with the last over

BENGALURU, 18 APRIL

David Miller sort of redeemed himself with two last-over sixes after KL Rahul made a 57 rooted in classicism and Tristan Stubbs produced an equally chic 60 as Delhi Capitals edged Royal Challengers Bengaluru by six wickets in their IPL match here on Saturday.

Considering the slow nature of this particular Chinnaswamy strip and the quality of RCB's bowling ranks, the chase of 176 was never going to be straightforward.

Miller (22 not out 10b) could not take Delhi home in the outing against Gujarat Titans when they needed two off 2 balls, inviting sharp criticism.

However, he did not make any mistake today, hammered Romario Shepherd for two huge sixes as DC, who needed 15 runs off the last over, scampered home, and RCB crashed to their second defeat of the season.

DC found saviours at various times in Rahul (57, 34b), Stubbs (60 not out, 47b), and Axar Patel (24 retired hurt) to make 179 for four, ending a two-match losing streak.

Rahul played an innings of rare quality, a bit un-T20 if you may, to rescue DC from a disastrous start and set the chase in order.

He took a particular liking for Josh Hazlewood, carving him for a total of two sixes and three fours.

In fact, both his sixes were of amazing quality the first one an inside-out lofted shot over covers and the second a flick, which he executed through a last-minute snap of wrist.

Rahul fetched his fifty in 30 balls but fell to Krunal Pandya, hitting the spinner into the hands of a diving Virat Kohli at long-on.

By then, Rahul and Stubbs added 69 runs for the fourth wicket as DC walked back from a precarious 18 for three in 2.5 overs. Stubbs and Axar added 47 for the fifth wicket before the latter had to hobble off the field with a niggle.

Delhi Capitals 179 for 4 (Stubbs 60*, Rahul 57, Bhuvneshwar 3-26) beat Royal Challengers Bengaluru 175 for 8 (Salt 63, Axar 2-18, Kuldeep 2-32) by six wickets. —*PTI*

RR eye rebound as struggling KKR seek spin spark at Eden

KOLKATA, 18 APRIL

A bruised Rajasthan Royals will look to bounce back strongly and deepen the misery of a floundering Kolkata Knight Riders when the two sides with contrasting fortunes clash in an afternoon IPL fixture, here on Sunday.

The match pits one of the stronger outfits this season against arguably the most out-of-sorts side.

While Rajasthan had surged with four consecutive wins before being halted by Sunrisers Hyderabad, KKR have progressed in the opposite trajectory, still searching for their first win after six matches.

Under Ajinkya Rahane, defeats have been the only constant, often from winning positions, leaving the side short on confidence and momentum. Their only point has come through a rain washout against the Punjab Kings here.

KKR's struggles have been compounded by an understrength pace attack, with Harshit Rana and Akash Deep ruled out due to injuries, while Matheesha Pathirana is yet to join. Yet, their on-field decisions under Rahane and head coach Abhishek Nayar have also come under scrutiny.

Selection calls and match management have raised eyebrows.

The 'entry points' of Chakravarthy have been particularly puzzling. Match starts: 3.30 pm. —*PTI*

Rampaging PBKS eye another win

MULLANPUR, 18 APRIL

Table-toppers Punjab Kings will bank on their strong batting to continue their winning run against a struggling Lucknow Super Giants, who are sweating over skipper Rishabh Pant's injury, in their IPL match here on Sunday.

PBKS, the only unbeaten side so far, have looked ominous this season with four wins from five matches, with one game against Kolkata Knight Riders washed out. The Shreyas Iyer-led side boasts a healthy net run rate of +1.067, thanks to their strong batting displays that have powered clinical chases.

The Kings have won nine of their last 11 matches while chasing since the 2025 season, underlining their dominance, and it was also seen in their recent win over the Mumbai Indians. It will take something special from LSG to halt the home team's momentum.

Lucknow, currently seventh in the points table, is reeling from back-to-back losses, and Pant's elbow injury in the previous match against Royal Challengers Bengaluru has further dented their campaign.

Pant looked in visible discomfort and retired hurt after facing just three deliveries. Though he returned later with his elbow heavily strapped, he managed only 1 off 6 balls, and his availability for Sunday's game remains uncertain. It was a one-sided contest against RCB as LSG could muster only 146, with Mukul Choudhary and Ayush Badoni providing some resistance. The match starts at 7:30 PM. —*PTI*

Mane clinches maiden AM Green IGPL title by 7 shots

JOHANNESBURG, 18 APRIL

Udayan Mane clinched his maiden AM Green IGPL Trophy, storming to a commanding seven-shot victory over the much-decorated Gaganjeet Bhullar at the AM Green IGPL Invitational South Africa here on Saturday. Mane, who had held at least a share of the lead since the opening round, endured an early wobble with two bogeys in the first four holes, a sharp contrast to his bogey-free run over the first two days at the iconic Royal Johannesburg Golf Club's West Course. However, the Indian responded with authority, firing seven birdies over the remaining 14 holes to card a final-round 67 and seal a dominant win. The triumph follows his third-place finish at the AM Green IGPL Mauritius last week.—*PTI*

B'desh vs Pak Test series: Sarfaraz named head coach

KARACHI, 18 APRIL

Former Pakistan captain Sarfaraz Ahmed has been named head coach of the Pakistan Test team as selectors named four uncapped players on Saturday for next month's two-Test series in Bangladesh. Sarfaraz, who won the Champions Trophy in 2017, retired from international cricket last month. The Pakistan Cricket Board also appointed former Test batter Asad Shafiq as the new batting coach, while Umar Gul will be the bowling coach. Left-handed batter Shan Masood will continue to lead the Test team with Babar Azam, Mohammad Rizwan and Imam-ul-Haq, the other experienced batters in the side. Abdullah Fazal, Amad Butt, Azan Awais and Mohammad Ghazi Ghori are the four uncapped players in the Test side.—*PTI*

90% of synthetic tracks in India are substandard

NEW DELHI, 18 APRIL

Ninety per cent of the synthetic tracks currently used in the country are substandard "material-wise, laying-wise, marking-wise", said Athletics Federation of India (AFI) spokesperson Adille Sumariwalla in a shocking revelation on Saturday.

Sumariwalla said the AFI has been told by World Athletics to get involved in the matter and clean up the mess. He, however, said there is no danger of the results or performances of athletes being annulled due to the substandard tracks.

"I'm not going to name the tracks, but I can tell you 90% plus tracks in India are substandard material-wise, laying-wise, marking-wise. We had a meeting with World Athletics in Tokyo (last year during World Championships), they showed us some data, which was quite shocking," Sumariwalla said during a virtual press conference.

"The material used is substandard, the process is substandard, the granules used are substandard, and the laying methodology is substandard. The thickness is substandard; instead of polyurethane, only rubber or tyre rubber is being used in some.

"We have seen tracks where they put the rubber of tyres below and only put red paint on top. It's that bad. Now what will happen? That will get finished over a period of time. In a few months, it will be finished.

Nobody will be able to run on it.

He said the AFI, during its Annual General Meeting in Kohima on April 14 and 15, has decided to get involved in track certification. —*PTI*

SURAJ CHAND, LONE INDIAN IN SEMIS

CHENNAI, 18 APRIL

Suraj Kumar Chand was the lone Indian to advance to the semifinals of the HCL Squash PSA Challenger Tour at the Indian Squash Academy here on Saturday.

Second seed Chand will meet Hong Kong's Wailok To in the last-four stage after easing past compatriot Om Semwal in straight games in the quarterfinals.

Results (quarterfinals; Indians unless specified).

Men: 2-Suraj Kumar Chand bt Om Semwal 11-8, 11-1, 11-4; 8-Jeongmin Ryu (Kor) bt 1-Ravindu Laksiri (SL) 4-11, 11-7, 11-6, 11-4; 4-Andes Ling (HK) bt 6-Lap Man Au (HK) 11-5, 4-11, 11-7, 11-8; Wailok To (HK) bt N Moganasundharam (Mas) 12-10, 11-6, 11-3.

Women: Sehveetrraa Kumar (Mas) bt 5-Nirupama Dubey 11-3, 11-6, 11-6; 7-Rouqaia Othman (Egy) bt 1-Rathika Suthanthira Seelan 11-5, 11-9, 11-8; 2-Harleein Tan (Mas) bt 8-Pooja Arthi Raghu 11-4, 11-5, 12-10; Salma Othman (Egy) bt 3-Mingyeong Heo (Kor) 12-10, 11-7, 13-11. —*PTI*

Fed Cup: AFI to start DNA testing of athletes

NEW DELHI, 18 APRIL

The Federation Cup in Ranchi next month will be the first major national championships where the Athletics Federation of India (AFI) will conduct SRY Gene tests in a bid to ensure that only biological females compete in the women's category.

The AFI will also start DNA testing of the Indian athletes to collect and preserve their data for the first time. The data will be used for research and development, prevention of injuries, training methods for a particular athlete, among others.

The results and records of both the SRY tests and DNA tests will be kept confidential.

"It (SRY test) is an ongoing process. Already, it started last year for the athletes who we feel are going to be in the international arena. It will just be a one-time test in a lifetime. Once these results are uploaded to the World Athletics website, they will be destroyed. So there is absolute privacy," AFI spokesperson Adille Sumariwalla said in a virtual press conference on Saturday. —*PTI*

2ND WOMEN'S T20I

India seeks better finishing, sharper pace attack against SA

DURBAN, 18 APRIL

A scratchy India will look to address their batting frailties in the backend and hope for an improved show from the pacers as they aim to bounce back against South Africa in the second women's T20I here on Sunday.

India never really got any momentum, and from 119 for 2 in the 15th over, the visitors ended up with 157 for seven, a target that was comfortably chased down with five balls to spare, with South Africa captain Laura Wolvaardt smashing a 39-ball 59.

India got off to a flier with Shafali Verma (34 off 20) leading their charge, but her more accomplished opening partner, Smriti Mandhana (13 off 14), did not last long. The fall of two wickets late in the power play put the brakes on India's scoring rate.

Skipper Harmanpreet Kaur (47 not out off 33) and Jemimah Rodrigues (36 off 29) then steadied the innings with a 71-run stand off 51 balls in the middle overs, but India failed to produce the final flourish, managing only 33 runs in the last five overs while losing three wickets.

Come Sunday, India will need to capitalise on the foundation, with the onus on the lower order to deliver in the backend and provide a defendable total.

"We could not capitalise as a batting unit. But positives for us are that even though we lost our way in the bowling innings, we came back really well to take this match to the last over. A lot of learning for sure," Mandhana said.

India, who have won their last four series, were also wayward with the ball, conceding 14 wides their second-highest tally in T20Is. —*PTI*

FOR WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS

BAI launches nationwide mascot contest

NEW DELHI, 18 APRIL

The Badminton Association of India (BAI) has announced a nationwide mascot design contest for the upcoming BWF World Championships 2026, on Saturday inviting fans, artists, and creators to play a role in shaping the identity of one of badminton's most prestigious global events.

Conceived to deepen fan engagement and celebrate India's rich cultural diversity alongside its growing badminton legacy, the initiative marks a first-of-its-kind effort by BAI to bring the community closer to the sport. With the BWF World Championships returning to India after 17 years, the initiative underscores both the scale of the event and the country's rise as a badminton powerhouse, highlighted by 15 world championship medals in the past decade, including PV Sindhu's historic gold in 2019 and Satwik-Chirag's bronze last year.

As New Delhi prepares to host the global showpiece, the mascot search offers a unique opportunity to craft a visual identity that reflects India's sporting ascent, cultural richness, and deep-rooted connection with badminton.

Open to participants of all ages, the contest runs from April 18 to May 10, with the winner set to receive Rs 25,000 along with VIP tickets to the semi-finals or finals.

"Badminton today is played and loved across every corner of India, cutting across regions, cultures, and backgrounds, and that diversity is what truly defines the spirit of the sport in our country," said BAI general secretary Sanjay Mishra.

"With an event of the stature of the BWF World Championships coming to India, we wanted to celebrate this India rising story through a fan-first approach. —*PTI*

Rachana appointed advisor to DP World PGTI

NEW DELHI, 18 APRIL

The DP World Professional Golf Tour of India on Saturday announced the appointment of Rachana Bahadur, senior vice president and country head – India at Synchrony Financial, as an advisor to the organisation.

Bahadur brings over three decades of experience across banking, operations and risk management. She is currently serving as Senior Vice President and Country Head for Synchrony India.

"I am honoured to join the DP World Professional Golf Tour of India as an Advisor," Bahadur said in a release.

"The DP World PGTI has played a pivotal role in developing and promoting professional golf in India, and I deeply admire its commitment to nurturing talent and creating opportunities for players. I look forward to contributing to its mission of elevating Indian golf on the global stage." She held senior leadership roles at Goldman Sachs, JPMorgan Chase and Morgan Stanley, and has over 18 years of global experience spanning the US, Asia and Europe. —*PTI*